

# PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE  
STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

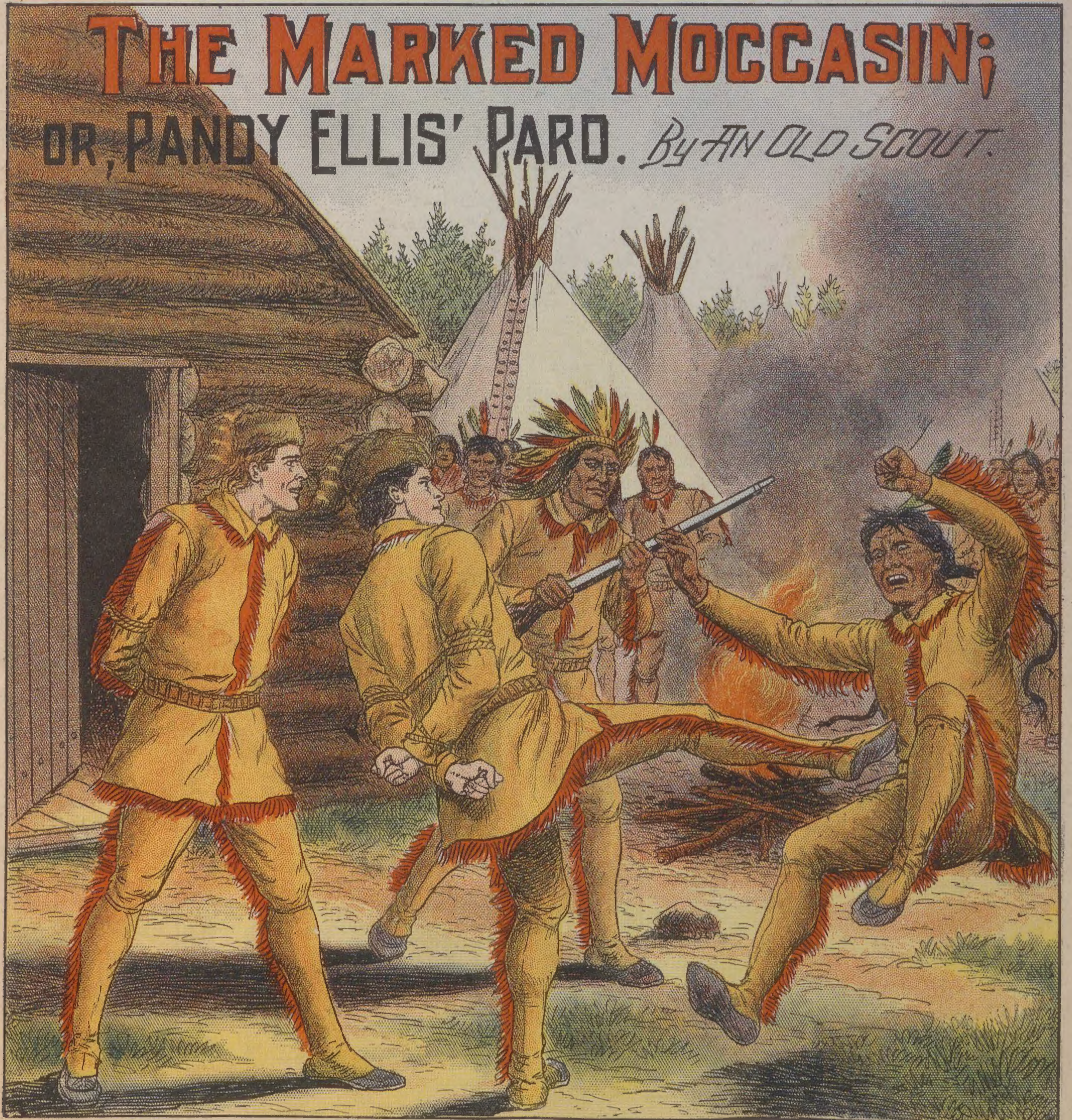
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No. 476.

NEW YORK, JULY 17, 1907.

Price 5 Cents.

## THE MARKED MOCCASIN; OR, PANDY ELLIS' PARD. *By AN OLD SCOUT.*



The dusky fiend ignored his bound condition and would have sprung at his throat like a panther, but a sudden and well-directed kick from Rupert stretched him out upon the ground. He bounded to his feet knife in hand.



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## THE MARKED MOCCASIN

OR,

## PANDY ELLIS' PARD

BY AN OLD SCOUT.

### CHAPTER I.

#### SILVER RIFLE, THE PRAIRIE SHARPSHOOTER.

"Painters an' powderhorns! the man what sez this stranger hyar daren't take his turn at the mark must run agin me, an' they do say as how it are wuss nor tacklin' a hay-cutter than ter git in the way o' this hoss. Step right up thar, boyee, an' let any critter dar dispute it. I kin lick ther hull crowd an' a dog under the wagon. You hear me? It's Roarin' Ralph Rockwood what sez it, you bet!"

The scene was a stirring one.

Fully fifty men and boys had gathered in the forest to compete for a prize put up by the colonel of the military post, and the reader has become familiar with such a gathering, so that it would be useless in my describing buckskin-clad men who have naught to do with my story.

There had been some dissatisfaction expressed because a young man, who was a stranger to all of them, desired to take a turn at the target; but these murmurs had now ceased. Two reasons for this could be given.

In the first place, the proclamation of the colonel, which had been posted in a prominent position, declared that anyone who chose could enter the lists and compete for the prize, and as that officer now appeared in sight the grumblers did not wish to cause an investigation, well knowing that they would not come out of it with flying colors.

Then again, Roaring Ralph was a man known to every one of them, and they dared not excite his ire for fear of the result.

The old ranger did not seem to be acquainted with the young man whose cause he advocated, but he had seen him before, and knowing something of his marvelous shooting qualities, desired a chance to witness the astonishment of the gathered soldiers and bordermen.

Besides, he was a lover of fair play, and knew that by the rules the desired marksman was entitled to his shot.

There was another motive, too, as might be gleaned from the few words which the veteran ranger uttered to himself:

"Tar heels an' turpentine! wonder if the gal are anywhars around. I'd like ter lay my ole peepers on her beautiful face again. How kin I do it? Ha! throw my sculp ter a Pawnee dog ef I ain't got ther game right in my hands. Soup-bones an' sauerkraut, thar's Reckless Rupert; I'll wait till it comes down to a fine point, and then get him ter try his fancy shot,

for thar's nothin' like strategy in all these things," with which comfortable reflection the veteran trapper lapsed into silence.

He chanced to be watching the young stranger when the colonel drew near, and was surprised to see him give a start, and pull his broad-brimmed hat still lower, so that it would be impossible to distinguish his face.

This significant action told the shrewd ranger that these two had met before, and that the younger man did not desire recognition.

The presence of the colonel was the signal for the beginning of the sport, and presently every one who had entered the lists had taken a shot at the tarket, and one-third of the number found themselves debarred from further attempts.

A second round was shot at a more difficult target, and fully one-half of the remainder found that their chances were cut short.

The young stranger, who had simply given his name as Silver Rifle, had fired both of these times with a nonchalance and dead certainty that proclaimed his utter contempt for such target practice, and his action had not failed to catch the eye of the champion shot of the past, he who had been designated as Reckless Rupert.

The match had really been gotten up to try conclusions between him and a sergeant who had lately come to the post, and whose reputation as a marksman had preceded him, for no one suspected for an instant that a rival would appear for the champion in any one else.

Astonishment was, therefore, rife when the sergeant missed the now difficult mark, and the contest was now limited to these two.

The colonel, disappointed and chagrined at the failure of his man to acquit himself creditably, now took a new and feverish interest in this new opponent of Reckless Rupert's. He leaned forward and scanned him eagerly from head to foot as if forcibly reminded of some one, and then shook his head sternly as though he would not allow such ideas to remain in his brain.

Meanwhile the sports went on.

Reckless Rupert was rather pleased than otherwise to discover that he had met a foeman worthy of his steel, and every device that an ingenious brain and a keen marksman could devise was brought to bear upon the matter.

He soon began to realize that he had met his match, for



not only were his shots copied to the minutest detail, but in many instances improved upon. For once Reckless Rupert was in despair; but at this moment a few words from Roaring Ralph caused his face to brighten.

Carefully he loaded his rifle, while the old ranger, picking up a wild gourd, walked away toward the east, carefully measuring his paces until the required distance was passed over. Then he turned and held out the gourd, which was the size of an orange, by the slender neck.

A dead silence came upon the assembly.

Like a statue Reckless Rupert stood, with his cheek pressed against the stock of his rifle. Then came the sharp report, and those who were watching intently saw the gourd fly into pieces, while the neck, several inches long, remained in the hand of the old imperturbable ranger.

"Ef thet don't bring her out, then I reckon nothin' will," muttered the Coloradan, as he gathered the pieces of the gourd and brought them to the crowd for examination.

The gourd had burst into about half a dozen large pieces, and these upon being placed together showed the little bluish hole made by the rifle ball.

Rupert stood by, a smile of conscious pride upon his tanned face. Roaring Ralph was watching the unknown sharpshooter out of the corner of his eye. He saw him hesitate, and then walk quickly forward to the spot where he himself had stood while holding the gourd.

Then placing a whistle to his mouth he blew several sharp notes upon it, waited a few minutes and repeated the signal, which it undoubtedly was.

Every eye was fastened upon him in wonder, all but Roaring Ralph, who knew what was about to happen, though he was none the less interested on this account.

While they watched, there suddenly appeared among the trees a gliding figure which approached the young marksman. It was a girl, dressed in the most picturesque border style, her long hair falling down below her waist, and the fawn skin garments, trimmed with beads and quills, showing off a form that Venus might have envied.

Putting into her hand a round gourd not over half the size of the one Reckless Rupert had broken, he uttered a few words in a low tone, and then walked toward the others as if carefully measuring the distance.

Then he wheeled about.

Something like an inarticulate cry came from the throng as they saw the girl place the gourd upon her fair head and stand there like a statue. All eyes followed the motions of the young man as he raised his rifle.

"Stop!" said a voice, hoarse with rage and something else besides, "this is madness. Would you let him imperil the life of that fair creature? In the name humanity, stop him, and he is welcome to the prize."

It was Reckless Rupert who gave vent to these words, and his face was aflame with various emotions. His eyes were glued upon the form of the young girl, and it was plain to all that this was not the first time he had seen her, for her presence under such peculiar circumstances affected him strangely.

Silver Rifle turned and gave him a scrutinizing glance, and then looked toward Roaring Ralph, who stepped forward ready to champion the young sharpshooter through.

With his usual characteristic address, the old Colorado ranger announced his perfect willingness to "everlastingly chaw to shark's meat" the man that dared oppose the venture of his protege, and showed such a cheerfulness in making the statement that there was no taker.

Again Silver Rifle bent his head; the weapon became as steady as a rock, and after a brief pause, during which one

could almost have heard the beating of his heart, the report sounded.

"Missed, by thunder!" cried those who had looked up in the air to see the pieces fly as they had done when Reckless Rupert fired, but as they dropped their eyes to the head of the fair girl it was discovered that the small gourd was gone.

One of the men ran out and returned with the gourd, which had two holes in it, so close to the center that the target had not broken. This he was about to show to the colonel, when the girl, for the first time, turned her face full towards them.

The officer uttered a loud cry.

"My soul! it is Dolly!"

Then turning he pointed to Silver Rifle.

"Seize that man! Fifty dollars to the one who lays him by the heels! Quick, or he will escape!" he thundered out.

The prairie sharpshooter dashed away, but a dozen would have been in pursuit had not Roaring Ralph sprang to the front and faced them, knife in hand, his bearded face flushed with fury.

"Dust my Sunday breeches, if I don't clean out the hull kit o' ye yet. Silver Rifle kim hyar at my invitation, an' he shall go clar. Whatever grudge ther kernal may hev agin him must keep. Now they're gone. Kernal, what do ye know o' that gal?"

"Know of her!" almost gasped the enraged officer; "confound your impudence, Rockwood, that girl is my daughter Dolly! As to the young man, he is one who has sworn war to the knife against me, and who will yet feel the weight of my anger."

## CHAPTER II.

### TO THE DEATH.

"Greaser, yer a cheat and a swindle!"

As the words were spoken, the man giving utterance to them sprang to his feet, and with remarkable agility swept the gold from the table into his pocket.

Astonishment had held his opponent mute for the moment, but he, too, sprang to his feet, uttering loud exclamations.

Drawing a knife, he would have sprung at the hunter had not the buckskin-clad worthy covered him with a revolver.

Lowering glances were cast upon him from many of the inmates of the den, but he seemed as cool as a cucumber.

"I've been in jest this same position afore now, an' don't keer a continental how soon ye begin operations. Thar'll be some hefty work for the coroner, I reckon, afore we're done. Is thar a man hyar what knows me?"

"I do," came a voice at this instant, and all eyes were turned toward the speaker, a squatty man, dressed in buckskin and wearing a huge felt hat. "I have cause to remember you. Gentlemen, take a look at my classical head. You will be pleased to notice that I am minus a fine pair of ears. That I owe to him."

As the stumpy hunter spoke, he removed his broad-brimmed felt hat, and swept back the mass of dark hair that was allowed to cover his neck. Sure enough, his ears were gone. The act also showed his face to be considerably slashed with old knife wounds.

The old ranger laughed as if tickled at the sight of the earless man.

"Yas, I sliced 'em off fur ye, Yaller Bob. Thet war afore ye gained yer present notoriety, an' when we cort ye stealin' our pelts up on ther Big Horn. Glad ter meet ye agin. Can't ye stir up a circus fur me hyar? Ther wolf blood hez been lyin' quiet in me so long that I'm afraid they'll think I'm under ther daisies along ther border ef I don't kick up a rumpus soon."

This dare-devil request rather staggered all who heard it.



and the squatty, buckskin-clad ranger glared around him as though too full of rage to answer.

"You will have enough of it to keep you awake, my fire-eater, for if I can help it you will never leave here alive. Gentlemen," he continued, turning to the crowd, "allow me to introduce to you a man who has been the bane of the border among our class for twenty years past, and agin whom I have a death-grudge—Pandy Ellis!"

As the name of the noted Indian fighter fell upon the ears of those assembled in the Deadwood gambling den, it was amazing to see how they shrank from him, as they would from one who had the smallpox.

It rather tickled the old man to see that he was not quite forgotten in the neighborhood, and bending down a trifle he drew a fifteen-inch bowie-knife from the back of his neck.

"Now I'm ready ter sail in. Guv ther word, Yaller Bob, an' see how soon I kin clean ther ranch out. Down in Santa Fe, ye 'member, I laid ten men on ther floor, an' I'd like ter keep up my reputation in this region. Yaller Bob, why don't yer say sail in?"

At this instant a tall form sprang through the open door and alighted at the side of the old ranger, who turned like a flash, ready to use either bowie or revolver; but a light flashed over his face as he recognized in the tall, handsome ranger one whom he had not seen for many months, and whom he little expected to come across in Deadwood.

"Blue Bill!" he exclaimed.

"You bet—and ready to help in the good work of cleaning out this den!" And the tall ranger also brought a revolver into view.

There was something of a sensation at the mention of his name, for it was not unknown among the men assembled there.

"Proceed with ther show, Yaller Bob—that's a good feller," insinuated old Pandy.

"To oblige you, I will. Comrades, be ready to sail in, and the man that drives his knife into the heart of Pandy Ellis gets my bonanza claim."

As Yellow Bob spoke, he suddenly turned a screw close at hand—a contrivance of the bartender's—and all the lights in the place were extinguished at once.

This was a neat little contrivance on the part of the proprietor, whereby he might escape should his life ever be threatened.

No sooner had darkness come upon the scene than the most tremendous uproar ensued. Loud oaths and cries rent the air, accompanied by a smashing sound of glass. Indeed, it seemed for a time as though Bedlam had been let loose, but not a pistol shot was heard.

Pandy Ellis and his comrade stood close to where they had been when the lights went out, ready to engage in a desperate hand-to-hand struggle for life, but as the racket gradually grew less in volume, what seemed to be the truth broke in upon their minds.

It was so simply ridiculous that they had to laugh outright.

All of the ruffians had skulked away.

By this time the noise had ceased entirely, and all that could be heard was a series of most melancholy grunts and whispered curses from one of the windows.

Old Pandy struck a match and applied it to one of the lamps in the place, which immediately gave them the benefit of its light.

There, stuck fast in one of the windows, was the redoubtable Yellow Bob. He had evidently been crawling out backward when the heavy sash fell across his back, pinning him there. Some one who had been pulling at his lower extremities outside, ran off as soon as the light appeared.

The two hunters laughed loud and long at the ludicrous situation of the rascal, and then Blue Bill, with an eye to business, swept what loose change that remained upon the various tables into his pocket, to reimburse them for their trouble, after which the two rangers left the place.

It was some ten minutes later, while Yellow Bob was making a solemn oath to be the death of both of them, that Pandy and Blue Bill stood face to face in a lone cabin on the outskirts of the town.

"Then you are on the trail?" asked Bill.

"I have started on it, an' will foller ter ther death. There's stirring times ahead, Billy," returned Pandy.

"Right you are, and I'm with you, old man. Here's to the death."

The parties shook hands, and the compact was sealed.

### CHAPTER III.

#### WOLF-BLOOD.

The far northwest.

Glorious old Sol was just hanging in the west like a ball of fire, and evening was close at hand, when two men broke through the bushes that bordered a clear stream of water and stood upon the sloping bank.

There they stood, leaning upon their rifles, and looking around upon the peaceful scene. What mission had brought these two stern men so far away from all points of civilization? This will be speedily made manifest.

After a cursory glance around them, the two sat down upon an old log that was moss-covered. Vegetation grew in luxuriance around, but there was none of that superabundance found in the equatorial forest that impedes travel while it presents a charming picture.

This was not the season for trapping, and the redskins were reported unusually fierce, so that their object must be indeed a strange one to bring them to this part of the country.

"Up to this time, old hoss, you have put off telling me the full particulars of the case, and now, while we sit here, I want you to relate the whole story. I am with you, first, last, and all the time, as you may understand by my coming to this wild part of the country." And Blue Bill drew out his pipe, charged it, and began puffing away as though taking it easy.

Pandy Ellis remained silent for perhaps a full minute, gazing at vacancy, as though his thoughts were far away. A troubled look came upon his face at the same time, and he winked rapidly, as if striving to keep back any womanly symptoms of sorrow.

"'Tain't a very pleasant subject ter think about, Billy, but I hev in part grown used ter it, an' will tell yer ther story jest as I know it. What thar air missin' yer imagination must supply.

"Bolly and I had separated, fur I had some business down in Mexico, while Bolly wanted to see some friends in Arkansas. It war several months afore I managed ter reach Little Rock, an' ye may well imagine ther news I heard liked ter hev killed me outright. Bolly hed once hed a brother, which he thought were dead. Many a time hez he told me o' ther lively times they hed together as boyees.

"It seems thet he hed been looked on as dead fur years back; so when a half-drunken galoot run agin him in Little Rock in the dark, he knocked him down. I never could understand jest how it war; all I know is thet they hed a regular duel on ther spot wid some friends on each side.

"Bolly was jest rekivering from a sick spell, an' I reckon his hand warn't as steady as it might a-been. His man fell, but got up agin. Bolly lay thar, shot through ther heart."

The old ranger bowed his head in his hands for a few minutes as though the story was too much for him, and Blue Bill could see his gaunt frame trembling with emotion. Presently



he looked up again, but there was a strained expression on his thin face, and a fierce glitter in the eyes that had made many a border scoundrel tremble to see.

"I heerd it all through Ned Price. Thar war a time when I didn't like Ned, 'cause I thort he war ther kind o' a critter ter stab a man in ther back; but when I heerd how he keered fur my pore pard, Bolly Wherrit, I shook his hand, an' swore I hed wronged him. I seen him cringe like, but never cud tell why he did it.

"Ter proceed with ther sad story.

"Ned took Bolly off an' hed him buried, while Jack Wherrit skipped the town. From some I heerd that he war terribly worked up when he found thet he hed killed his brother, but run fur fear some o' ther boyees would take vengeance on him, ther cowardly brute.

"I would ter Heaven I hed happened inter Little Rock about thet time; thar'd been a terrible time, fur I'd hev cut ther drunken coward's weasand out. I've been on his trail ever since, an' I'll foller him ter ther end o' ther world onless death steps in an' takes a lead. When I find him—the slaver o' my pard—then woe ter him, Blue Bill, woe ter him!"

The old ranger's voice trembled with rage, and Blue Bill knew that when the end came, and he face to face with Jack Wherrit, the reckoning would be terrible indeed.

"Ther trail hez been plain ter me, fer ther man hez ther family mark o' the Wherrits—his left foot air crooked, an' everywhar ye kin tell him by ther moccasin track. I've known Bolly war near often, when accordin' ter my calculations he should hev been far away, jest acause I kim acrost that marked moccasin.

"Tain't like an ordinary trail, fur ther fellow can't change it ter save his life. Ther family mark were not quite so strong in Bolly, but it hez had much ter do wid his life. Twice, ter my knowledge, he came near going under, 'cause some critters what had a grudge agin him folloed ther trail o' ther marked moccasin.

"Then agin it hez done him several good turns. Thar war one in particular thet comes ter my mind. Bolly war in a bad fix. He had run agin Yaller Bob—the very critter we hed ther disturbance with at Deadwood—an' his gang o' sweet angels, an' after flustratin' three of 'em, ther boyee found himself a prisoner. They hated Bolly like bloody pizen, an' it took 'em quite a while ter hitch up an idea by which he should shuffle off this mortal coil, as ther feller sez.

"They hit it at last.

"Now, I've known Bolly ter be in quite a number o' unpleasant perdicymments. Thar war, fur instance, the time when he fell inter ther hands o' ther Hudson Bay trappers arter tumblin' under ther queer ole mound whar the Blackfeet buried ther dead centuries ago. They tied him ter a log an' set him afloat that time, an' a pesky affair he had o' it when ther ole log tried ter turn.

"Then agin I 'member down in Mexico somewhar, Bolly shut himself in a cabin wid four human devils an' fit it out. Now, that warn't much fer an ole codger like me ter do—I've been shut up with a score an' left half o' 'em lyin' thar dead—but I thort it too reckless in ther boyee, fur he never war sich a devil in a fight as ther ole man when he gits on ther rampage.

"I could tell ye o' a half dozen more cases whar Bolly found himself bad off, but none o' 'em would ekal this un.

"Them critters had fastened him ter a powder keg, lighted the fuse, and left him ter watch death creepin' toward him in the fire. Why, it makes me shudder jest ter think o' it.

"I run agin that marked moccasin trail, an' kim in sight jest at ther critical moment, but I hed no hand in savin' ther lad from ther powder; he did thet himself.

"Jest afore they left him, he coolly begged, as a last favor, thet Yaller Bob give him a good chaw o' 'bacca, an' ther

critter, suspectin' nothin', done it. When they war out o' sight, what did Bolly do but salivate ther powder o' ther train, so thet when ther fire kim along it war extinguished at this wet place.

"I found him sittin' thar, chewin' away as contentedly as a cow at her cud. Jest as I released the lad the pesky outlaws kim up, wonderin' why they hadn't heerd no explosion. We had quite a tussle with 'em, and Bolly fit like a king. Ah, me, ter think ther lad'll never stand side by side with me agin. It's enough ter make one shed tears o' blood! You an' me make a team, Blue Bill, but ye could never be to me what my ole pard war. Fur nigh on ter forty years we hev clung ter each other, an' it do seem as though Pandy Ellis war now an old trunk with ther limbs chopped off. My curse on Jack Wherrit!"

From behind the log, further on, a man's face arose. His eyes were fastened upon the old ranger, and he seemed fascinated by the emotion of Pandy Ellis. Now and then a shudder passed over his frame, but he lay there among the trailing vines, motionless, until Blue Bill sprang to his feet with an exclamation:

"Look! here's the very trail we lost at noon. Fortune has brought us to it again. There can be no mistaking that footprint. The wretch has been here, has even sat upon this log!"

Pandy Ellis sprang erect.

"My soul, I'm lost!" was the thought of the hidden man, as he drew back his head and flattened himself out still more against the log.

"Yas, he's been hyar; that's ther mark o' ther pizen sarpint—the wretch thet made ole Pandy Ellis wuss nor a widower. Would ter Heaven we hed come sooner! His time air drawin' near, an' may my arm wither if it fails me when ther hour comes ter avenge Bolly's death! Oh, I could tear ther devil limb from limb, an' hurl him inter the gates o' hell piecemeal! Would that ther war tortures ekal to a thousand deaths, ther murderer o' my pard should feel 'em all!"

"Come, old man, you are exciting yourself too much. This wolf-blood in you must find an outlet soon, or you'll have one of your crazy spells. Let us hunt a camp down the river, and in the morning follow this trail here—to death!"

"Yes, to death!" muttered the old ranger, arising and walking after his comrade.

Ah, if he had but known that it was the presence of the reptile they sought that made him so restless, he might have found a vent for the savage wolf-blood.

When the forms of the two trappers had been lost among the trees and gathering twilight, the craven, Jack Wherrit, crept out of his place of concealment, and with a white, set face skulked away, trembling and yet desperate as a wolf at bay.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE SPECTER CANOE.

The spot where the two hunters pitched their camp was one quite different from that which they had recently left.

They were in the mouth of a ravine, and while the river could still be seen in front, back of them lay a dense thicket, and on either side was the giant forest trees.

Night had come, with all the accompanying noises. The stars looked down from the blue heavens, but it would be some time before the moon put in an appearance.

Blue Bill had started a small fire, which was almost invisible twenty feet away, as it was built in a hole dug in the ground. Over this the handsome ranger was cooking some venison, while Pandy lay near by watching the operation with half-closed eyes, a trick of the veteran trapper.

When the meat was ready, they plunged in without further ceremony. There may be something in the grace said at some tables, but with many it becomes a mere form. The truest



way of showing thankfulness is to prove it by fully enjoying whatever is set before us.

Supper over, the two men allowed the fire to go out, and settled themselves for a smoke. Knowing that they were in a dangerous country, where the Blackfeet were generally found as thick as bees in a hollow tree, they puffed their smoke in almost complete silence, exchanging only a few sentences occasionally, and these in a low tone.

Finally Pandy proposed sleep, and to this Blue Bill readily acquiesced, for they had tramped many miles during the day just spent, and Pandy was ready to acknowledge that when it came to a tramp he was not the man he used to be in his younger days.

They had already made rude couches of leaves and hemlock branches, and upon such beds they had passed many a night in slumber, so that these were deemed comfortable resting places.

The night passed on.

Jupiter led his hosts across the blue firmament, in the ceaseless march of time. Almost overhead the god of war, fiery Mars, glowered down like an eye of evil upon the slumbering earth.

Strange noises came from the forest, near and far, but the howling of wolves and cries of various nocturnal birds and beasts would have been music in the ears of a backwoodsman.

In the east the moon arose, looking like a Chinese shield of silver hung in the Heavens, and in places where her light found an ingress between the tall trees that lined the river bank, it trembled softly upon the water.

It could not have been very far from midnight when old Pandy Ellis raised his head from the ground and held it in a listening attitude. From long service in the backwoods his ears had become acute in a marvelous degree, and on many an occasion he had proven this.

The sound that reached him was the light dip of a paddle upon the water, but it must have been something of more power than this that had waked him up.

Gaining his feet he laid a hand on the arm of Blue Bill, who responded to the touch almost instantly.

The two men then crept down the ravine to the river, which was speedily spread out before them. At this point the stream was about twelve or fifteen yards across from bank to bank, and just even with them the moon lit up its surface for a stretch of half a score of feet.

Closer comes the sound of the paddle, and it was evident that the canoe was near at hand. Both men gripped their rifles nervously, for thoughts had entered their minds that it might prove to be the man they sought, and the eyes of old Pandy seemed to flash fire at the idea.

In imagination Pandy was once more kneeling upon the lonely grave of his old pard, renewing the oath of vengeance; and was it necessary to chase the murderer over the whole world, he and Blue Bill would do it, so that in the end Bolly's death was avenged.

Closer came the mysterious bark.

There was a singular regularity in the strokes that fell upon old Pandy's ears as unnatural. The person who used the paddle must be an adept, indeed, to wield it with such precision.

"Thar it is!" said Blue Bill.

Looking up the stream, the two men could see the shadowy outlines of a boat, with a human figure standing erect in it. The vessel was speeding down the river with lightning rapidity, and even while they watched, it reached the edge of the illumined spot and shot into view.

The occupant of this spectral craft was a man, dressed in

trapper costume; and, as his hat was off, they could see his long white hair streaming down upon his shoulders.

Only for a few seconds did the white bark canoe remain in sight, and then both the vessel and its occupant were lost to view in the semi-gloom beyond.

Pandy Ellis caught Blue Bill's arm in a grip of steel, and his voice was husky, as he said:

"Did ye see him, Billy? Heaven help me! That war the speerit o' my old pard, on whose grave I swore that terrible oath. Ther ghost o' Bolly Wherrit cries aloud for vengeance!"

## CHAPTER V.

### ON THE WAR-PATH.

Both Pandy Ellis and Blue Bill remained motionless for a full minute after the phantom canoe and its ghastly occupant had disappeared.

The words of the old ranger added to the strangeness of the spell that bound them. Finally Blue Bill raised his hand and dashed it across his face. Of the two, perhaps, he had the least touch of superstition in his nature; or it might be that Bolly Wherrit's death did not seem so real to him, through mere hearsay, as to the old veteran who had knelt upon the grave of his chum away down near Little Rock.

At any rate, Blue Bill fancied there must be something wrong, and his action in throwing up his hand was to ascertain whether or no he was dreaming. Upon being reassured as to his state of wakefulness, he turned upon his companion:

"I am puzzled, old man. If I didn't understand that he was dead, I'd surely say we had seen your old pard. You are quite positive that Bolly went under?" he asked.

A grim smile appeared on Pandy's thin face.

"I tell ye, Billy, my oath war taken on his grave. Ned Price told me ther whole yarn, an' took me ter whar he had buried ther ole man. No, thar ain't ther least doubt in my mind but what we hev seen ther ghost o' my pard. They say murdered men's spirits haunt ther man what sent them outer ther world, an' I reckon poor Bolly can't rest easy till retribution overtakes Jack. He looked as natural as life, did Bolly. Come, let us go back ter our camp, Billy; this thing hez upset me completely."

Truth to tell, the old ranger's hand was trembling as it had never been known to do in the face of the greatest danger. Feeling that the dead had visited him, perhaps to urge the pursuit of Jack Wherrit more keenly, he was worked up to a tremendous pitch of excitement.

They sat upon their couches for some time, and talked the matter over. Pandy finally convinced Blue Bill as to the truth of his assertion, and he was just as firm a believer as the veteran in the existence of a disembodied spirit. That they had looked upon the specter of murdered Bolly Wherrit neither of them doubted in the least.

Blue Bill finally lay down and passed into the land of Nod, but old Pandy started up his pipe and lay there reflecting on the marvelous spectacle upon which his eyes had rested.

Believing, as he did, that he had been the recipient of a visit from the dead, the old man grew very solemn while thinking of the past. Without the comrade who had been at his side in almost every difficulty in which he had been engaged, the future looked black indeed, and the old ranger dared not spend much time in contemplation of it.

The past had more charms for him, and in thinking of it Pandy felt the tears crowding his eyes. He looked sharply at Blue Bill as if ashamed lest his emotion should be seen, but the dashing ranger was fast locked in the arms of Morpheus.

That midnight vigil was never forgotten by old Pandy, for the full tide of his loss came rushing upon him, and he bowed his head in grief.



Gradually, however, the pain passed away, and he calmly looked to the future. He was an old man, already past the time allotted to human beings, and through all his life he had been almost miraculously saved from scores of dangers when all hope seemed gone.

Perhaps his time was near at hand, and Heaven had taken this means of warning him. Well, let the grim monster come; he had faced him too often to fear him now. He had ever raised his hand in defense of right and the weak against wrong, and his brave soul would meet the Master of Life with not a stain upon it other than those which will assail even the best of men.

His cogitations were interrupted.

The conviction suddenly came upon the old trapper that there was something moving upon the bank of the ravine, for his ears had not been hurt by age, and were as keen as ever.

Instantly Pandy was on the alert.

He turned his gaze upward, while his hand, almost unconsciously, as it were, reached out and grasped his trusty rifle. A bush rustled, and immediately his eyes were glued upon it.

The moon had made its appearance above the bank, and this very bush reached to its lower edge, so that if aught appeared above the twigs, it must be plainly outlined against the silver disk that hung in the blue sky.

Ha! no wonder the old trapper started and clutched his rifle more firmly. There arose from behind the bush the feathered head of a Blackfoot brave. His ebon hair hung in straggly masses from his scalp, and was profusely decorated with feathers and such gaudy embellishments.

As the moon was behind him his face was not outlined, but it was easy enough to picture it, glaring with rage and triumph, the eyes fastened upon the two trappers below; for as the moon had now gained quite a high altitude, her rays fell upon both of them.

Pandy remained as motionless as a statue, his eyes glued upon the silhouette of the redman, as placed against the bright face of the moon.

Thus for a few minutes matters remained stationary.

Then the Indian's arms were slowly elevated, part of a bow came into sight, and it could be seen that he had already fitted an arrow to the string. His eyes were fastened upon the form of Blue Bill, probably because the dashing ranger lay in a little more prominent position.

Did he intend firing?

There could hardly be a question in relation to this fact, for the Blackfoot was evidently not the man to go through such maneuvers for nothing.

Probably the two rangers had been observed as they made their way through the woods, and followed to their camp in the ravine, after which the spy—perhaps this brave himself, seeing that he was so eager to have the first blow—had made his way to where his comrades could be found, and led them to the scene of action.

There were others close by; the old trapper could hear the bushes rattling above him on the other side of the ravine, and knew the warrior with the bow was not alone.

One great wave of excitement seemed to surge through his frame, and then he was as cool as ever before in his life.

The wolf-blood had leaped in rejoicing at the prospect of an immediate and severe conflict, but he had quieted it.

The redskin evidently thought that by virtue of his discovery he had a right to demolish one of the daring palefaces, and it was no doubt fully arranged that when the death-cry of the stricken ranger burst upon the midnight air, the other Indians should throw themselves upon the remaining white, and either capture or make away with him.

Quite a neat little plan, indeed, but it was fated to fail at the very start.

Knowing that he, too, was in full view of the Indian, and perhaps, several others besides, Pandy gave up the idea of raising his gun.

He was an expert at firing off-hand, and could do just as much execution without giving them the slightest warning of his intentions.

Slowly the Indian raised his bow until it had been brought into the proper position; at the same time Pandy was elevating his gun by degrees until he was sure that it was bearing directly upon the painted devil behind the bush.

There was no time to lose.

When the Indian had gained his desired position he would give a quick, spasmodic jerk, and the arrow would be sent forward with force enough to drive it clear through a buffalo.

Authors speak of an Indian slowly drawing the arrow back to the head, holding it there for a few seconds, as if to aim, and then letting drive; but this is all sheer nonsense. No one ever saw an Indian send an arrow thus. They aim by guess-work, and gain a double amount of force by throwing the whole body forward with the shot; the whole work is done in an instant of time.

No man knew this better than Pandy, and, therefore, he got himself in readiness, so as to be able to defeat any such move on the part of the redskin.

Keenly he watched the fellow's every move, and when the final instant arrived, the old trapper's finger pressed the trigger of his rifle.

There followed the sharp, stunning report.

Close upon its heels came a horrible shriek of human anguish. The Indian bow and arrow were thrown high up in the air, and as for the ill-fated brave himself, he made a spasmodic leap, and came thudding down into the ravine, tearing away the vines and bushes in his death-plunge.

Old Pandy was on his feet in an instant, and although Blue Bill had been aroused from a deep sleep, he was not many seconds behind the veteran. He seemed to comprehend the whole matter in a flash, for the Indian yell put him into possession of the facts.

He rolled over several times almost in a twinkling, grasped his gun, leaped to his feet, and gained the side of his companion.

They had quite a hot time before them, but neither man thought of shirking the encounter even for an instant. For all they knew there might be fifty of the red fiends, but it was their desire to close with them first, and only retreat in case of overwhelming numbers.

Both men had immediately leaped from the moonlight into the dense shadow that lined the eastern side of the ravine. It was well they did so, for in another moment they would have been the targets for many savage marksmen.

As it was, upon turning around after gaining the shelter of the shade, Blue Bill saw three long arrows quivering in the ground at the very point where he had lain, and realized that he had not been an instant too soon in rolling away from the spot.

The two men crouched down and waited for what was sure to follow. Blue Bill had drawn his rifle up close to his shoulder, and was only watching for an opportunity to use it, while Pandy held a seven-shooter in his hand.

All this had taken place in a few seconds of time, and then came the result. There was a crackling of bushes and a dozen dusky forms came plunging into the ravine like so many wolves in search of quarry.

Blue Bill's rifle sounded the death-knell of one brave, and old Pandy's revolver commenced its quick but terrible work.

Then the Blackfeet sprang madly upon them, and the fight became a hand-to-hand one, where each one strove with the power of a Hercules for supremacy, and where grim Death hov-



ered with his skeleton hand upraised to clutch all who might fall into his power.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE MYSTERIOUS HUNTER.

The moon was shining from a clear sky, and a broad stretch of prairie land, illumined by her silvery light, lay like a sea of glory, the gentle night wind now and then disturbing the grass, and making it undulate here and there like the billows of the ocean.

It was a glorious spectacle, and not a thing seemed to mar the serenity of the scene; but stay, from out the timber line dashed a horse, upon whose back sat a man dressed in buckskin.

In his hand this hunter grasped a long, deadly rifle; his face could not be seen, as the broad sombrero shaded it from view; but his long white hair streamed out behind him as he dashed madly along.

Occasionally he turned in the saddle and looked behind him as though pursued, and that this was the case was speedily made manifest.

When he had ridden about a hundred yards there burst out of the timber, with a series of shrill yells, a score of mounted Indians, who urged their horses with every conceivable method after the hunter.

The moonlight chase had evidently been already continued for quite a time, and the horse of the white-haired hunter must have been already fatigued when it began, for he showed many signs of weariness now, while the animals of the red men were for the most part fresh.

Away dashed the mad riders.

Turning in his saddle the white-haired hunter aimed his rifle. Probably the Indians already knew what execution he could do, for they seemed to fear him, as every warrior flattened himself out upon the back of his steed.

Crack!

The hunter knew a trick worth two of theirs, and as the report of his gun rang out, one of the mustangs received the fatal lead, plunged forward, and threw his unsuspecting rider fully twenty feet away. Whether injured by the shock or not, the brave was most effectually counted out from the struggle that was bound to take place.

Once more the Indians arose and urged their wiry steeds onward. Their gain was very evident, and one could almost decide upon the time it would take for the end of the race to come.

The mysterious hunter's horse fairly staggered, and yet with a determined nature, which only a man who has had such a noble animal can understand, he used every effort to keep up the race.

Finally a volley of shots broke from the pursuers, and the arrows and bullets hurtled around the mad rider. One, by accident, struck his horse's leg, and the animal came to a sudden halt, so that it was with difficulty the man kept himself from falling.

Understanding exactly what was the matter, the white man leaped to the ground. Hardly had he done so than his steed, with a piteous moan, plunged forward and fell lifeless to the grass.

A savage shout rang out from the redskins when this fact became apparent, and they urged their horses forward as if anxious to reach the man at bay; but it was wonderful to note how quickly this determination was changed when the white-haired ranger raised his long rifle.

Every Indian sank behind his horse, and they seemed to wheel to the left, although the horses were still going forward at a mad pace.

"Dash my moccasins, if they ain't got the Comanche trick.

Waal, that's wuth comin' so far north ter see, I swar. Who ever heard o' Blackfeet tryin' thet dodge afore? They don't quite git the hang o' it; I reckon I could do better myself without practice. I'll let 'em understand thet amateurs can't come thet game on this chicken."

About this time there was formed a complete circle around the mysterious ranger that continually moved in the same direction, and as the arrows and bullets began to cut the air around him, the white-haired hunter realized that unless he wished to fall a victim to a chance missile, he had better drop behind the body of his dead horse.

This he proceeded to do, and from his place of concealment watched the maneuvers of the enemy, showing more surprise and interest in regard to their actions than fear of the result, which proved beyond a doubt that the strange man cared not a cent for his life.

Gradually the living circle around him was contracting, and whoever had taught the Blackfeet this trick of their Texan brothers must have instructed them in all particulars, for they understood what was expected of them.

Sooner or later the end must come.

This would probably arrive when his rifle was empty, so that by firing it he would bring matters to a crisis. Deliberately singling out a certain one of his enemies who was foolhardy or ignorant enough to expose himself more than his fellows, the hunter threw up his rifle and took a quick aim.

The report came so speedily that one could almost imagine it to be a snap-shot. There was a terrific yell, and the brawny warrior, his foot caught in a loop of rope that had been used for some purpose, was carried away at the heels of his mustang.

As the hunter had suspected, this was the signal for an assault. His rifle was now empty, and he would have no time to reload it, so he threw the weapon into a clump of tall grass, where the Indians would not be likely to find it, and at some future time he might expect to recover it.

True enough, the Indians turned their horses toward the center of the circle, and urged them madly forward. They no longer tried to conceal themselves behind their steeds, only bending low as they urged the animals forward.

What followed was one of the strangest scenes of border adventure on record.

Naturally, one of the Indians reached the point of action in advance of his fellows, and, drawing in his mustang, bent over to send an arrow through the form of the crouching trapper.

It was a fatal action for him.

As if charged with electricity, the form of the mysterious hunter sprang erect. As he did so his revolver was discharged, and the Indian, with a shrill howl, fell backward from his horse.

At the same time the old ranger shot upward and assumed the position vacated by the redskin. Then, turning upon the astonished Blackfeet, he sent several bullets among them.

Almost before they could realize what had occurred, the valiant ranger was careering over the moonlit prairie once more, with a fair prospect of eluding his enemies.

They chanced to have their weapons ready, however, and immediately sent a storm of missiles after the fleeing man.

The effect was disastrous to him, for one of the arrows, sent by no mean hand, pierced the horse's leg, and soon made its presence known, for the animal began to run lame.

By this time the Indians were after him full tilt, whooping, yelling, and discharging every weapon they possessed at the daring paleface, who had eluded them so boldly when everything seemed to point toward his capture or death.

Still, he continued to keep ahead of them, but it was only by dint of much effort; for the wound which his horse had re-



ceived was beginning to tell upon the animal, and it required every effort on the part of the hunter to keep up this pace.

He eagerly looked ahead, hoping to see something that would give him hope, but as far as the moonlight allowed him to see, nothing encouraging came within the scope of his vision.

In his right hand he still firmly grasped the revolver, his only weapon saving the knife that rested in his belt, and it was evident that should matters come to close quarters once more, he would use both of these to advantage.

Thus the mad race went on.

Unconsciously to both parties, it was converging toward a certain point where the white man would have a chance to show his strategic powers once more.

Upon the prairie, a couple of miles from the mountains, there rested a peculiar stone. How it came there learned savans had never guessed, nor the freak of nature that had split it in twain; yet there it was, with a passage through the middle wide enough for three horsemen to ride abreast.

When within thirty yards of this stone the horse upon which the mysterious hunter was mounted suddenly gave out, and he only saved himself from sharing the fate of the unfortunate animal by a dexterous leap, when he felt his steed falling under him. Once more he was afoot upon the prairie, with his exultant foes dashing down upon him with furious yells.

The hunted man cast one swift glance around him, and then plunged into the grass, which close beside him grew to a height of several feet. When the Indians reached the spot, they plunged into this grass plot, searching right and left for their would-be prey, but not a single sign of the hunter could they find.

Had he vanished in thin air?

Just then one of the Blackfeet spied the peculiar rock, and in a moment had communicated his suspicions to the rest. Away they went pell-mell toward the place, feeling confident that they would find their game there.

This fact was soon made evident, for a couple of shots sounded, and each was immediately followed by a death-cry from a brave.

Bending low upon the necks of their mustangs, the remainder of the vengeance party sped forward. Once they reached the rock and the intrepid hunter would stand no show whatever.

As they advanced they separated, so as to come upon the rock in several directions, and thus diminish the hunter's chances.

Three more shots sounded, and two of these proved fatal to as many steeds of the Blackfeet, thus dismounting a couple more.

No further opposition was made to the advance of the Indians, who a few seconds later reached the rock. While half a dozen shot around it, others dismounted and boldly plunged into the opening.

To the extreme amazement of all, not a sign could they discover of the enemy. He had been here, that they were ready to swear, but in some mysterious manner he had eluded them.

Beyond the rock the grass was short, and it seemed utterly impossible for any one to be concealed in it. Amazement rendered the Indians speechless, and those who guarded the rock sat upon their horses around it like so many statues.

One of these, hearing a noise above him, looked up just in time to see the form of the mysterious hunter, knife in hand, leap from the basin-shaped top of the rock, only half a dozen feet above the Indian's head, and land behind him on the mustang.

## CHAPTER VII.

### MONEYMAKERS OF THE BORDER.

"Buffler's hoofs an' bar's claws! reckon thar hain't nobody ter home hyar, seein' as I've rapped till my knuckles air sore,

an' yet I kin swar ther's smoke a-comin' from ther chimney. Tar an' feather me ef I know any other way than ter jest sail in an' make myself ter home. Thet's me, Roarin' Ralph Rockwood, ye bet!"

The old ranger had been standing in front of quite a commodious but ancient log cabin, situated far away up in the forests of Blackfoot land, and which had at one time evidently been occupied by a band of trappers either on friendly terms with the redmen or else possessed of an unusual spirit of bravado.

When he had rapped until he was tired without receiving any reply, the old reckless ranger made up his mind to enter, nolens volens, so he lifted the latch, and stepped into the cabin.

He found a cheery fire burning on the hearth, but not a soul in sight. Evidences of occupancy could be seen in many directions, for the place had a cozy appearance just then. There was a quantity of cold food upon the table, and with a charming assurance, the old ranger sat down and "tackled" it, to use his own expression, taking out his huge bowie to assist in the good work.

In the meantime his eyes were roving about, and he gazed in undisguised wonder at an elaborate, though small press of some sort, also the tools that could be seen around. Had he fallen upon the retired home of some old hermit, who intended passing the remainder of his life in solving some tremendous problem of evolution or perpetual motion?

The old ranger was not one to puzzle his head to any great extent over a problem, when a simple exercise of patience would develop the whole matter, so he remained seated in the rude chair, calmly devouring the lunch set out for some one who had not appeared to claim it.

This was old Ralph's way of doing things, and he generally came out of the horn with honor.

As he sat there he indulged in reflections.

"Tar my heels wid soap, but I can't guess what this ranch air. One would think thet thar war a reglar treasury department in these hyar wilds, jedgin' by this."

As the old man spoke, he stretched out his hand and picked up a bundle of singular papers that rustled in his grasp. The light of the fire had revealed to him the fact that he held in his hand a package of banknotes.

It was as easy as falling off a log to get at the truth now, for Roaring Ralph had heard that there was a band of counterfeiters somewhere in the great northwest, though he knew little of their working.

While he was inspecting the neatly done up package of bills, he gave a sudden start, and cocked his head on one side as though some suspicious noise had caught his ear.

Another moment and the ranger had jumped to his feet and grasped his rifle. Then, only pausing to listen once more, he bounded toward the ladder that led to the loft, his moccasined feet making no noise.

Reaching it, he ascended with the agility of an ape, notwithstanding the fact that he held his long rifle in one hand.

Once in the loft he crouched down, and glued his eye to a wide crack in the floor, which was speedily betrayed to him by the light of the fire below coming through.

The footsteps and voices he had heard were now at the very door, and immediately he knew this had been opened to give ingress to the newcomers, whoever they might prove to be.

There were two of the men.

One stepped up to the fire and gave the logs a kick with the heel of his boot, which had the immediate effect of stirring up the blaze, so that now the features of both men were rendered visible, especially as they took off their hats and threw them upon the table.



Roaring Ralph uttered a low cry.

One of the faces, at least, was very familiar to him, and yet he was greatly amazed that the owner should be found away up here in the far northwest, and seemingly the owner of this strange ranch.

"Yaller Bob, by the Eternal!" was his unuttered comment, as he looked down upon the two.

The individual whom last we saw wedged in between the sash and heavy window frame in the Deadwood gambling den was indeed below the old reckless trapper, and from his manner it was plain to read that he had a claim of some sort upon the rickety cabin in which they were.

The other man was a heavy fellow, with a bearded face and matted hair.

Roaring Ralph entertained a suspicion that he had seen him before, but just then could not place the rough-looking customer.

Yellow Bob eyed the eatables on the table a little suspiciously, as if wondering whether he had demolished such a quantity of them, and then invited the other to plunge in, which he lost no time in proceeding to do.

Soon they were engaged in conversation, and by listening intently, the man in the loft could hear every word that was spoken. Singularly enough, almost the first words he heard proved to be his own name.

"So you hate this Roaring Ralph?" inquired Yellow Bob.

"Like pizen."

"My sentiments exactly; I hev an old grudge against the critter which has been keeping warm these many days back. I hadn't any idea that you had run against the old critter."

"Waal, I hev. Thar's his marks."

As the man spoke he swept back the masses of coarse hair and revealed the fact that his ears were not where they should have been.

Some hand had sliced them off!

Ah, Roaring Ralph knew well enough now who this rough-looking customer was.

As if conjured up from the past, there arose before him, in imagination, a scene in a trapping camp some years before, when this man was caught in the act of robbing his traps, and in the presence of the whole brigade he sliced off his ears as a mark that would forever brand him a thief.

"Hist me inter a Pache's grave ef it ain't my old enemy, Black Donald. They allers told me that the critter would never furgit that job, an' it seems that they war korrekt," muttered the ranger.

Yellow Bob uttered a cry of horror when his eyes beheld the work of the old trapper.

"D'ye mean to say them's his ear-marks?"

"Jest what I mean."

"Then I reckon ye've got a stronger grudge agin him than me, and if the old reptile ever falls into our hands I'll take my revenge out in watching ye play the devil with him. I reckon thar ain't no torture that would be too keen for ye, Donald."

The other gritted his teeth.

"I hev laid awake nights thinkin' what I would do to that critter when I faced him. Since the day when this yer happened, some years back, I hain't seen him onct, and when the time comes Roaring Ralph had best look out, for I'm a tiger from the jungle."

"How was it you let him escape before. I should have thought you'd have slain him on the spot."

"So I would if ther hedn't been nigh onter twenty o' his kimrades around us. The fact is, I war neatly caught skinnin' his traps. They kicked me outen ther camp, an' I daren't lay 'round in ther hope o' pickin' Roaring Ralph off, fur them men would a-hunted me ter ther death.

"If I hev sworn once ter be ther death o' my enemy I hev a

thousand times. I ain't in no hurry, fur I know ther time will come around all right, an' some day I'll find myself face ter face with the man I hate jest like ye hate a rattlesnake."

"Then you do not fear him?"

"Fear him? Not much!"

"But Roaring Ralph is no common man. Desperado as I am myself, I should hate to be shut up in a dark cabin with him, and a knife placed in each of our hands."

"Waal, now ye've struck it. I confess such a thing wouldn't suit me very much, but if I could get Roaring Ralph in a place where my shooter would cover his heart, I reckon I wouldn't fear him very much," and the burly scoundrel broke out into a rough laugh, in which the other joined.

"There's a little difference in the position of affairs, I confess, and in such a case I wouldn't fear him much myself. Let us talk more of business, my friend. The boys will be here to-night to carry off the last issue, a package of which lies on the table beside you. What, is it not there? Why, I would be ready to swear that I left it there. Ah, here it is upon the floor. When I heard your signal down at the double oaks I must have misplaced it in my hurry to meet you. This is our cozy den, where there is no more danger of disturbance from the authorities than from the man in the moon. The Indians, too, are friendly. They call me the money-chief, and I make their chiefs an occasional present, in good money, of course, else our little game here might have been dropped on."

"True enough. By the way, old hoss, this hyar knife's a terrible weapon. Who kerries sich a thing 'round these diggings? Bless me if I'd like ter hev it in my side. Thar's sich—thunder and lightnin'!"

Black Donald had carelessly lifted the huge bowie for a closer inspection, and his eyes fell upon a name, rudely carved upon the handle:

"Roaring Ralph Rockwood, you bet!"

No wonder the giant started back with a cry of mingled amazement and alarm, letting the huge knife fall from his nerveless fingers to the floor, in which it stuck and remained quivering from the violence of its descent.

"What is it?" cried Yellow Bob, astounded by this strange action on the part of his comrade.

"Look an' see. Blue blazes, but the critter must hev been hyar!" and Black Donald began to look nervously around him.

His companion was not a whit less excited when he had also read that inscription.

"Roaring Ralph has been in here since I went out to answer your signal. I thought it seemed as though the meat had diminished wonderfully; then that package was on the floor instead of on the table. I hadn't noticed the knife you were using, or else my suspicions might have been aroused.

"Your deadly enemy is in this immediate vicinity, Black Donald. The opportunity you have waited for so long has come at last. Now, what do you intend to do about it?" asked Yellow Bob.

"So?" yelled the latter; "bring me face to face with the critter, an' I'll show the tarnal snake!"

A human form dropped from an open trap in the floor above, and Black Donald saw standing before him his mortal foe.

"Dust my Sunday breeches!" cried Roaring Ralph; "hyar we air, Black Donald, an' one o' us stays hyar forever!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### RECKLESS RUPERT.

A small fire blazed in the heart of the forest, and bending over it was the same young girl whom we saw at the shooting match upon the border, and whom Colonel Leonard had called his daughter Dolly.



To many upon the border she was now known under another name, and this was the musical one of Prairie Belle.

Even as she watched the frugal supper cooking, the bushes parted and a young fellow stepped into view. There could be no mistake about his identity; there was the same clear-cut face that bore a marvelous resemblance to the girl's, the same curly head, and upright form we have seen once before, when he stood up before the assembled settlers and soldiers and won the prize which he had never received.

It was Silver Rifle.

There was a strange, sad expression upon his face that told of some heart trouble, which will be revealed as this story progresses. On the other hand, the young girl appeared to be all life and animation, as though it was her loving duty to cheer her companion.

"Watchman, how goes the night?" she asked, with a laugh, as the young sharpshooter reached her side.

"Coast seems to be all clear. Reckon we'll have supper now if it's ready," he replied, the cloud passing from his brow at the sound of her sweet voice.

"In a few minutes. Just you get down here and replenish the fire, and all will soon be over. Keep in mind the fact that you have been starving for the last two hours, and then perhaps our frugal repast will taste so much the better."

Silver Rifle laughed, as, laying down his rifle, he obeyed the commands of the little border queen.

His eyes followed her every movement, and it could be seen at a glance that his love for her was as deep-rooted as his life.

Presently she announced that supper was ready, and invited him to sit down, which he did. It is wonderful how the deft touch of a woman's hand will make the most doleful-looking desert bloom with brightness. Heaven be praised for giving us woman to cheer our otherwise lonely lot on earth.

What with her deft little ways of managing, and her silvery laughter, which, though subdued, could not be wholly quenched by the danger of her situation, the meal passed off as nicely as though they had before them one of Delmonico's repasts instead of simple venison steak and coffee.

While they were thus engaged in eating, a human form was crawling through the forest in the direction of their little camp.

This silent crawler was no greasy, paint-bedaubed Blackfoot warrior, but a young hunter clad in a new suit of buckskin that became him wonderfully.

Now and then he paused, and arising upon his knees, took in his surroundings. Through the sparse undergrowth the fire of the young fugitives shone like a beacon, and toward this star of hope he was dexterously making his way.

Finally, when he was near enough to see distinctly, he cautiously raised himself and glided behind a tree.

This act revealed his features and identity.

It was Reckless Rupert.

What was he doing in this far-away northern forest? The fact of his emotion at the sight of the young girl explained in part his mission, for he had felt his heart stirred at the sight of her as it had never been before by womankind.

From his place of espionage he could see the two by the fire distinctly. His eyes rested the longest upon the young girl; indeed, they seemed to be riveted there as if she possessed a magnetic power over him. This was nothing singular, for he had loved the young girl these many months back, though it was a silent affection.

Finally, in glancing around, his eyes fell upon Silver Rifle, and a dark cloud passed over his face. Reckless Rupert was a handsome man, and, as his name signified, a daring one; still there was much that was good in his composition, and

which would be brought to the surface at times when the occasion demanded it.

He looked on Silver Rifle as his rival, for there could be no mistaking the fact that these two loved each other. His eyes were glued upon them; he saw the young girl place her hand upon the head of the prairie sharpshooter as if to cheer him, and then Silver Rifle, drawing her down to him, gently kissed her.

There was no demonstrative affection in the action, but it showed the deep love that bound these two together.

Reckless Rupert gave a groan that welled up from the heart as he saw this, for it seemed to seal his doom. Up to this time he had hoped that something might arise to befriend him, but in this kiss he read the destruction of his wishes.

He bowed his head upon the tree and gave way to bitter reflections.

He was aroused from this state, not by any movement of the two by the campfire, for they were still sitting there, gazing into the coals. The sounds he heard came from the surrounding forest, and to the ear of an amateur would not have been anything unusual.

To Reckless Rupert, however, the case was extremely different. He had been a ranger upon the plains for many a year, and to him these wolf howls were very significant, insomuch as he believed them to be counterfeit.

Eagerly he listened for a repetition of the suspicious sounds, nor were they long in coming.

There could now be no mistake; the Blackfeet were among the trees, having doubtless been attracted by the light of the campfire, and in a very short time it would be too late to warn the lovers.

Reckless Rupert lost no time.

Leaping forward, he reached the camp in a few great bounds. The young man heard him coming, and such was the rapidity of his actions that by the time Rupert had gained the side of the little fire he found the rifle of the other bearing upon his breast.

"What would you?" sternly demanded Silver Rifle, who had immediately recognized the other as his rival at the shooting match, and was suspicious of his presence there.

"Hush!" cried Rupert, "you are surrounded by Indians. Listen, and you will hear their signals to each other among the trees. A few more minutes and any warning would have been too late."

"I am inclined to believe you," said Silver Rifle, lowering his weapon. "I have been upon the border long enough to distinguish the mock cries, when my attention is called to them, at least. What would you do, friend?"

"Do! First of all this fire must go out."

Suiting the action to the word the young hunter sprang upon the fire, kicking the embers right and left, and stamping upon them so savagely that one would imagine he had an especial spite against each individual one.

In the sixth part of a minute hardly a sign of the fire remained.

"Now we must get out of this as speedily as possible. I do not doubt your knowledge of woodcraft, but as I have scouted in this part of the country before I know something of our whereabouts; so if you have no objection I will assume the position of guide."

"I accept your proposition with thanks, and believe you mean well. Before we move let me ask you one question, strange though it may appear to you. Are you aware of the presence of Colonel Harvey and his men anywhere in the vicinity?"

"I have not seen or heard a thing of the colonel since that day of the shooting match," replied Reckless Rupert, wondering at the strangeness of the question put to him.



On that day he had been so wrapped up in watching Dolly that the words of the colonel to the effect that she was his daughter, and Silver Rifle one between whom and himself there existed a bitter feud, had been lost upon him, so that he could not conjecture now what under the Heavens the handsome young fellow feared the colonel for, or even wished to keep out of his way.

"You will swear this?"

"I solemnly swear it!"

"That is enough—we entrust ourselves to your guidance. I must apologize at a more fitting time for the suspicions I entertained concerning your presence here. Lead on, sir. Come, Dolly, give me your hand."

Reckless Rupert now found himself in a strange position.

Here was the girl whom he fairly worshiped, and either her lover or husband, he knew not which, but at any rate the man who stood between him and that which his soul longed to possess.

Naturally he should have hated Silver Rifle bitterly; but to his surprise, he found that he entertained a feeling of respect and friendship for the young sharpshooter.

These two he was trying to lead to a place of safety, while the signals of the Blackfeet were ringing through the forest.

Reckless Rupert was a man well versed in prairie lore, and yet he was not the very best one in all the world to take friends out of such a trap, for as a general thing, his methods were of too desperate a nature.

Very often it is just such means that succeed the best; but under circumstances like the present, the better and safer plan would have been a more cautious one. From his heart he meant all for the best, and if his plans did fail, it was not because he failed to do his very utmost.

As they walked noiselessly along, it became evident to even the young girl herself that the Indians were growing as thick as bees around a basswood in full blossom, for their signals sounded from almost every quarter. They had seen the fire extinguished, and realizing that those who had built it must be aware of their presence, did not hesitate to signal each other in an open manner.

"Be prepared for the worst," whispered Rupert, "for the pesky critters are as thick as skeeters in a swamp. Once we are discovered, and all hope of escape is well-nigh gone; but we can die like brave men, defending the young lady here. Hist!"

Close beside them there was a rustling of the bushes, and at the words of the young trapper himself and friends sank down to the ground.

Another instant and there was a sharp, ringing cry that echoed through the forest, and then the figure of a painted Indian bounded from the bushes. It was still light enough for them to see him, and like a flash Silver Rifle discharged his weapon.

Of course the Blackfoot went plunging into the bushes, a dead man, for the prairie sharpshooter never missed his aim; but before they could run a dozen paces, it seemed as if every tree gave up an Indian brave, and the two young hunters found themselves in the midst of a howling mass of painted devils, against whom they could make no more impression than on a solid rock.

## CHAPTER IX.

### HILT TO HILT.

Pandy Ellis and Blue Bill certainly had their hands full. There had been fully a dozen of the Blackfeet in the beginning—at least that many leaped like red panthers into the ravine.

The revolver of old Pandy had diminished their numbers several, and when Blue Bill emptied his rifle, a death-cry

announced that another of the redskins had gone to his eternal rest.

Nevertheless there were still enough of the Indians left to give them some trouble; but neither of them could complain, as they had both been complaining of inertia only a short time before, and here the opportunity was given them to let their wolf-blood have a show.

The Indians must have realized that they had fallen upon some desperate characters, for they fought like tigers.

Pandy was in his element.

These redskins had not murdered his chum, but they gave him a splendid opportunity to give vent to his fury, and he improved upon it in a manner that was simply marvelous.

Dropping his useless revolver, Pandy drew his long bowie. At about the same instant a tall brave leaped at him with the bound of a panther, but he found that he had caught a Tartar, for one of the ranger's hands instantly encircled his throat, and the terrible blade sought his heart.

Casting the man from him as he would a stick of wood, old Pandy, the king of the wild border, sprang into the midst of the yelling foes. The gleam of his knife could be seen in the moonlight, but it was soon engaged in hot work.

He fought like a Hercules, and there was not one who could stand up before him. Like a raging lion he tore through the ranks of the Blackfeet, and then turned back on them again.

Meanwhile Blue Bill was not idle.

When he had emptied his rifle he clubbed the weapon and sprang into the melee, dealing blows right and left. Blue Bill, when aroused, was a perfect whirlwind, and between the two they bade fair to clean out the whole crowd. Indeed, half of the redskins were already hors de combat, and by the way Pandy was sawing away with his huge knife there would be another corpse inside of ten seconds.

It was at this interesting moment that one of the heathens, who had succeeded in getting a position back of the dashing ranger, made an agile leap and landed upon his back.

Blue Bill turned instantly, but of course, as the fellow's arms were clasped tightly around him, his gun, as a weapon, was entirely useless.

Dropping it, he squirmed around until he could get his arms loose, and then seized the fellow in a hug almost equal to that of a grizzly bear.

Both of them were unusually strong men, and the contest for supremacy seemed about nip and tuck for quite a time. Bill could not throw his antagonist, nor could the Blackfoot master him.

In their wild struggles they left the other combatants, and went reeling down toward the riverbank, which, as is already known to the reader, was only a short space from where the trappers had pitched their camp, for Pandy and Bill had seen the specter canoe upon the water without hardly moving from the spot where they had laid down.

Unmindful of this fact, the two combatants engaged in such a desperate struggle went whirling down the ravine, and finally drew up on the very bank of the river.

Here the contest continued for quite a little time longer, until finally, in endeavoring to perform some cunning trick that would place the white hunter at his mercy, the earth gave way under the feet of the redskin, and he plunged down into the cold water of the river.

In falling, however, he maintained his fierce hold upon Blue Bill, and as the handsome ranger had no means at hand for sustaining the shock, he was compelled to follow the redskin.

Thus it was that the two mortal foes found themselves in the cold water.

The fall had not been over ten feet, but both of them went



under with a splash, and upon making their reappearance the fight commenced in earnest.

Neither of them had as yet been granted an opportunity to draw a weapon, though in the belt of each there rested a keen knife.

Once in the water and it became the fierce endeavor of both foes to duck each other under and thus end the contest.

Blue Bill quickly realized that by an artifice he might deceive the Indian and gain an advantage that would give him the ultimate victory.

He pretended to become weaker with each passing second, and the Indian, seeing this, pressed him the harder, endeavoring to push him wholly under water and keep him there until he drowned.

Blue Bill pretended to allow this; still it required both of the Indian's hands to keep him there, while with one of his own he quickly drew his bowie. One sudden upward sweep and the keen blade had accomplished the business. A shrill yell sounded, the ranger threw the struggling form of his foe off and saw him vanish down the river. Then, holding his knife between his teeth, Blue Bill clambered up the bank, holding on to the roots and vines.

The top was reached at last, when, upon looking up, he saw a shadowy figure above him.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE DUEL IN THE CABIN.

The scene in the cabin was exceedingly dramatic, to say the least.

Roaring Ralph had discovered an old trap in the attic floor, and the thought had occurred to him that it would be a splendid idea to open this and drop down before the two men who were telling each other how much cause they had to hate him, and what terrible things they would do in case of ever running across him.

The idea was just such an one as to suit the reckless old ranger.

He had been upon the prairies the better part of his life—indeed, ever since a boy, and every now and then was likely to get upon the rampage, when he generally tore things with a high hand.

Tickled over the thought of giving the two men a neat surprise, the ranger was carefully laying the trap back when he saw the little drama occur in reference to the knife.

Now was the most fitting time to betray his presence in order to carry out the eternal fitness of things, so down went the old ranger in the manner described before, landing in front of Yellow Bob and the other.

As for the chief of the money-makers, he expressed surprise, but no fear. The grudge between Roaring Ralph and himself was not of a very desperate nature, and besides, the fellow was cunning enough to put the whole matter upon the shoulders of his companion.

As for Black Donald, he recognized in the old gray-haired ranger the man who had cut off his ears in the trapper camp years before, and in spite of himself a shudder ran through his frame.

Roaring Ralph himself was the first to break the silence. His fall from above, although light in itself, had still been enough to set the rickety floor to vibrating, and it was evident that there was a cavity below, and that the timbers that held the floor were unusually far gone.

"Sculps an' sassengers! hyar we air. Beloved, an' 'twar a sweet scene ter gaze upon. Thy bootiful phiz, Black Donald, air enough ter make a man satisfied wid life; ye hev called me, an' I'm hyar. Now what would ye? I kin see ther fight in yer black eyes. How well you'd like to slice off my ears, so that yer own would stop itchin'. Here's yer chance, then.

Lollypops an' lobsters. Yaller Bob, will ye act as referee in this jewel?"

"With pleasure," responded the polite counterfeiter, for this was just what pleased him.

"Then, Black Donald, draw yer weapon. We'll hev it out right hyar, chaw me up fur an alligator if we won't now," saying which, Roaring Ralph drew his long bowie from where it had stuck up in the floor, deposited his rifle in a corner, and then once more faced the earless man.

Black Donald was not one-tenth so eager for a fight as appearances had made him seem a few minutes before. In his heart he feared the old ranger like grim death, as was evidenced by the fact of his keeping clear of him these years that had passed since his ears were made to pay the penalty of his thievery; although, during this time, he had continually boasted of the terrible revenge he intended to take when fortune should bring him face to face with the old ranger again.

Now, however, the alternative was forced upon him to either fight or show himself a coward, and besides, he had reason enough to hate this man, so there was nothing left for him but to plunge in.

Here the old ranger stood, knife in hand, and ready for the fray. Yellow Bob, for some reason of his own, dropped all personalities for the present, and resting himself upon the table, declared that he would act as umpire, and decide in favor of the one who came out first best.

Black Donald drew his knife.

The action was not near so fierce as one would naturally expect, after hearing his vows of vengeance upon the man who now faced him. Still his knife came out of its sheath, and after that there was no retreat for him.

He had no reason to fear, for all his life he had been noted as a swordsman, and could handle the bowie with the best of them. Unless, then, his alarm had detracted from his usual skill, he might expect to come out of the fight victor.

There was one thing that made him uneasy. He knew the reputation of the old ranger, and that when once he was aroused, he was apt to prove a perfect hurricane, whose equal could scarce be found upon the border.

If the matter had been left to him he would never have fought, but the presence of Yellow Bob made it a case of necessity now.

Thus it is pride often forces us to do that which wisdom and prudence would never permit, and so Black Donald found it.

"Bullets an' bayonets! hyar's at ye, ole hoss, an' ef yer come outen ther scrimmage wid ary a nose left ter ye, then it won't be ther fault o' this critter, Roaring Ralph Rockwood, you bet. Whoop!"

There was a clash of steel, and then the two men had met in the encounter from which it seemed one of them would probably never come out alive. Of the two the old ranger was certainly the more active, and resembling a panther in his movements, he was apt to do most of the aggressive work. If Black Donald could defend himself from the assaults made upon him he would be doing well enough.

Roaring Ralph had no especial cause for hating this black-featured man, beyond his usual feeling toward the class of desperadoes to which the other belonged, but he knew that Donald sought his life, and would not hesitate to put a bullet in his back should the occasion occur; so that he was determined to give the fellow another lesson, and make it interesting for Yellow Bob, who sat upon the table near the middle of the room, highly delighted with the stirring scene.

Black Donald was no novice.

He had seen some stirring times in his own life, and as has been said before, knew how to wield his blade quite well.



but then he was really no match for the old ranger in agility, and that commodity counts a great deal in a hand-to-hand fight.

The two men, after crossing blades, devoted themselves to the game in hand, and yet Roaring Ralph did not neglect to keep an eye on Yellow Bob, for he half fancied that worthy would be endeavoring to put his oar in, should the tide of battle set against his friend in a very strong manner.

The ranger was ready to draw his revolver in a twinkling should this occur, and would probably have made it lively for both of them.

It was his policy, however, to let on as though at times he was getting the worst of the fight, and retreat before the furious onslaught of Donald, who, completely deceived, would plunge recklessly forward in anticipation of a speedy victory, flushed with the thought that he was bearing the other back, until suddenly the old ranger would assume the offensive again, and rain such a shower of blows upon the earless man that it was all he could do to ward them off.

Roaring Ralph was magnanimous.

Several times he could have dealt a blow that would have told upon the contest, but he refrained from doing so. Perhaps this was partly due to diplomacy, for he did not think much of Yellow Bob's honesty and sterling qualities, and felt sure the scoundrel would just as soon send a bullet through his (Roaring Ralph's) head, in case he saw the fight going against Donald, as he would wink should a fly alight on his nose.

While he fought, the old ranger became imbued with an idea. He noted the dilapidated condition of the table upon which the self-appointed umpire sat, and concluded that it would be an easy thing to bring him into the affair.

The floor during this time was shaking violently with the efforts of the two men, and threatening to give way with every movement.

Roaring Ralph, suddenly assuming the offensive, drove the other rapidly backward toward the table. Meanwhile the umpire was indulging in personalities.

"Good for you, Donald; chase him. There, look out! A fine blow, old buckskin. Tables are turned now. Go it, Roaring Ralph! Whoopee! why do ye run, buzzard? Thar, he's after ye like hot cakes. Oh, this is what I call fun; it's just glorious sport for the boy in the fable, but death to the frogs, which—hi there, have a care or—good Heavens, look out or——"

Bang came Black Donald against the table, which went over like a shot, the earless man following, and such was Roaring Ralph's momentum that he could not stop himself, and so accompanied them.

This was too much.

The rotten floor gave way, and through the yawning gulf shot table, Yellow Bob, the earless man and our Roaring Ralph, down—to what?

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE DEATH LODGE.

Vain was the struggle of Reckless Rupert and the young prairie sharpshooter, for it seemed as though there was an Indian for every tree in the forest; and what could two men do against such a host?

They fought like heroes, long and well, and if they did not cover the ground with their slain foes as did Bozarris and his Greeks of old, they at least made quite a good impression upon the Blackfeet.

Several times Reckless Rupert saw a chance, which, by taking advantage of, he might have gotten clear, but somehow he could not bring himself to do this.

The thought did not occur to him then as afterward, that remaining free he could have done his friends more good

than as a fellow captive. All he looked at was his desire to be near Dolly, and share the fate of her he loved so madly and yet so hopelessly.

So long as there was a chance of resistance, the hunter would not submit; but when he saw Silver Rifle held fast in the arms of several stalwart braves, he knew that it was useless to struggle longer.

Forcing his way to the chief of the party, whom he knew very well, he suddenly threw his gun at the redskin's feet, and raised his hands in token of submission. Having thus placed himself under the protection of the chief, it would have been as much as any warrior's life was worth to have made even an effort to slay him.

"Howling Wolf, I give in. Your braves are like the leaves of the forest, and it is useless trying to stand out against them. I am your prisoner."

The chief uttered a few words, and immediately all signs of hostility ceased, though two men held each of the hunters after disarming them. An inspection of the field showed that three braves had met their fate, and dark looks were cast upon the whites when this fact was ascertained. It would not be well for them when the time came for them to retaliate.

Besides the dead, there were fully a dozen of the Blackfeet who possessed wounds of some sort, more or less severe, which went to show the good use our two friends had made of their time and weapons.

The young girl was treated well.

Evidently Howling Wolf had seen her before, for his black eyes lighted up as they fell upon her lovely face, and he gave some orders in his own tongue which Reckless Rupert construed to be commands as to the good treatment of the white squaw.

This pleased the ranger, and yet deep down in his heart he realized the truth, and had a dim suspicion that this courtesy on the part of Howling Wolf foreboded evil to the whole of them in the future.

The Indians camped in the ravine until morning, and then, after making something of a meal, the march for the village was commenced.

During the night Rupert had determined upon his plan of action, and this entailed his accompanying the Indians, for he had resolved to remain with them so long as they held the young girl in their power.

Reckless Rupert was capable of great powers either for good or bad, although his life up to this time had never given occasion for them to be brought to the surface. Now, however, he had firmly resolved that if by the sacrifice of his own life he could help the girl whom he loved, there would be no hesitation on his part.

The Indians wondered at the cheerfulness with which he walked along. If Silver Rifle or the young girl suspected the truth they gave no sign of it.

Several times Rupert caught the eyes of the girl fastened upon him, and he flushed at the thought that he detected in them something more than mere sympathy; but the idea of her feeling any interest in him when her lover walked at her side was absurd, and the young ranger chided himself for allowing it to remain in his brain an instant.

The tramp was a dreary one, for the Blackfeet had no horses.

In the middle of the afternoon, however, they were joined by a party of half a dozen braves with horses. This was part of the band with whom the unknown hunter fought. Five of the braves were desperately wounded, and the sixth was taking them home, while the rest of the band continued their hunt.

Up to the last account, however, it may be said that the mysterious hunter had not yet been captured or slain.



This meeting was fortunate in one respect—it gave Dolly a horse to ride, for at a command from the chief, an able warrior leaped from his seat and took his place among the other braves, while the young girl was helped upon the back of the steed, although she needed but little assistance.

When night came they were so near the Blackfoot village that it was decided not to delay but press straight forward, as the men could stand it, and Dolly was now mounted.

So the march was resumed after a halt of a few minutes to eat a morsel and quaff the clear water of a brooklet.

The scenery was perfectly grand when the moon arose and peeped through interstices in the trees; it seemed like a glimpse of fairyland; around them the soil was fertile and the trees grew to an immense height, so that it had no resemblance to the groves of scrubby trees generally found in the northwest.

Howling Wolf took great pleasure in telling the captives that they were now near his home, though he did not say what their fate was to be. It was easy to see from the gleam of his eyes what he had in store for Reckless Rupert and the young prairie sharpshooter. Strange to say, neither of them appeared to be affected in the least.

Rupert was conscious of his own power to escape when the occasion arose for such a move, and had, as we already know, fully decided to meet the fate of his friends if he could not rescue them.

As for Silver Rifle, he knew a trick that would very likely save his life, even though he had been the means of helping several of the Blackfeet warriors from off his mortal coil.

The moon was, perhaps, two hours high when the night wind bore to their ears the distant but distinct barking of a dog.

This sound seemed to please the Indians exceedingly, for they talked among themselves, breaking their moody silence.

In less than ten minutes the chief gave utterance to a long, loud whoop of singular intonation that echoed strangely through the still night. It was answered by loud cries from the village, and then there ensued a perfect pandemonium of howls from both sides, until finally the lodges were reached.

The two captives were thrust into a stout cabin near by.

It was the Death Lodge.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE PANTHER'S LAIR.

After Bill's severe tussle with the Indian in the water, it was annoying, to use no stronger term, to find another enemy above his head when he reached the top of the bank.

The indistinct form of his enemy stooped over him as if to wield either the tomahawk or scalping knife, and Blue Bill prepared for a tremendous spring in order to grasp the throat of his dimly seen foe, when suddenly there fell upon his ears a voice.

His expected foe was old Pandy Ellis.

Blue Bill could not but give a sigh of relief, for a fight with a brawny Blackfoot warrior under the circumstances would not have been very agreeable.

Old Pandy assisted him to gain a footing, and then a hurried survey of the late battlefield was taken, which revealed the fact that with one or two exceptions their foes had been annihilated.

They left the ravine and began to follow the course of the river, intending to secrete themselves somewhere until morning came, when they would seek the trail of the Marked Moccasin and follow through forest and stream, over prairie and mountain, until their prey was run to earth.

After proceeding for several hundred yards, old Pandy came to a halt and motioned Blue Bill to do the same. What he had seen or heard the latter knew not, but he had implicit

faith in Pandy, and sank to the ground without the least hesitation.

A human figure was stealing along not over thirty yards from them, and when he came into one of the moonlit places they both caught their breath and remained transfixed.

Once before that night had they seen that specter figure, and both men felt themselves shaking as they gazed upon it. Pandy, who had knelt upon the grave of his pard, felt it the worst, but neither of them could stir an inch until the image had vanished from the spot.

Then Pandy arose.

They continued their tramp, and in a short time arrived at a place where they concluded to remain until daybreak.

The place where it was now determined to rest was nothing more nor less than a great tree. One side of it seemed perfect, but upon the other a keen eye would trace an opening under some vines.

The trunk of the tree was hollow.

Blue Bill stepped up to the tree in advance of Pandy, and parting the vines, vanished from view in the interior of the giant.

As he did so, the ears of Pandy Ellis were saluted with a low growl that seemed to electrify him.

"Look out, Billy; thar's a painter inside!" he cried, with sudden emphasis.

Blue Bill had by this time found it out for himself. No sooner had he stepped inside the tree than he became conscious of the fact that a pair of glaring eyes were fixed upon him, and mechanically he had pulled back the hammer of his rifle without a second's delay, at the same time raising the weapon a trifle so as to bring it on a line with the fiery orbs, as near as he could judge by intuition.

The roar of his gun sounded immediately after, and just as soon as the weapon was discharged he dropped upon his hands and knees, letting the gun fall at the same time.

His hand was at his belt and on his bowie in a trice, and as the blade came from its sheath, he heard a scrambling close by him as the panther struck. Blue Bill turned, knife in hand, to receive him, nor was the attack delayed a second.

Man and beast went over on the ground, sometimes one underneath, sometimes the other. All the time both were at work, Blue Bill plunging his terrible blade into the side of the beast, and the panther chewing the hat of the ranger.

Bill had, very fortunately for himself, clutched the throat of the panther with his left hand, and such was the power of his arm that he succeeded in keeping the brute's teeth away from his throat, though by some chance the panther managed to lay hold of his hat, which was demolished pretty well.

Old Pandy, outside the tree, was in a fever of suspense all this while, for though he had full confidence in the ability of his friend, he knew what it was to be caged with a wounded panther.

Gradually the noise became less violent, and he knew that the contest was drawing to a close, with what result he could not even guess.

At length complete silence fell upon the interior of the tree. Pandy's worst fears were aroused, for all at once it struck him that both of the combatants had been killed.

Therefore, his hand shook a trifle with emotion, as, cautiously advancing his long rifle, he carefully parted the vines in the endeavor to have the moonlight enter the cavity.

Ha! a moving object caught his eye; one of the combatants was still alive and about to issue forth. Man or beast, he knew not which, for the moving object was stretched out more like the panther than a human being.

Pandy covered it with his rifle, and once this was done there was no hope for the panther, should it prove to be such.

"Speak out, or by ther leapin' catamount I'll splinter



thighbone. Ef it air ye, Blue Bill, then Heaven be praised; if ther painter, then ye hed better hev skipped yer den this night, fur hyar ye die!"

"Hold hard, old comrade; Blue Bill it is, and right side up with care. Here, help me haul the critter into the moonlight; there's something queer about the animal, I don't know what, exactly. Tar and feather me, Pandy Ellis, get down on your knees and look here!"

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### ROARING RALPH'S MATINEE.

If excitement was what Roaring Ralph wanted, he certainly had enough of it. Yellow Bob had sat upon the table, evidently taking an infinite amount of delight in seeing his enemy engaged with someone else, for he could enjoy the affair without being in any danger himself, which was the best part of it all. When, however, the catastrophe occurred, the outlaw did not find his position as enviable as he could have wished. The shock must have been tremendous, for the three men, together with the rickety table, went plunging to the floor, and, unable to stand the shock after all that had previously occurred, this gave way and allowed the whole caboodle to go through. Very naturally, Roaring Ralph was the last to go through the gaping hole in the floor. Roaring Ralph had a dim idea of seeing lights and human forms as he shot through space, and then he struck upon the ground. Again fortune favored him, for Yellow Bob chanced to be directly beneath him, and thus became the recipient of almost the whole collision. As for Black Donald, he was so unlucky as to fall upon his back, with the table covering all his form but feet and head. He had not lost his senses from the shock, as was evidenced by the fact that he remained in this recumbent position during the exciting little scene that ensued. Roaring Ralph sprang to his feet like an acrobat, and threw a quick, astonished gaze around him. The sight he saw was enough to make a look of surprise come upon his face. He had fallen into the money-maker's den. Around him were half a dozen brawny men who had been engaged in some occupation before the arrival of the three, together with the table, through the floor. They had sprung erect, and were gazing upon the strange sight in dismay. Then up leaped Yellow Bob. With a string of oaths he turned upon his men, and pointed to the cool ranger.

"Seize that reptile! It's Roaring Ralph, and to the man that lays hands on him first I will present a thousand dollars in good gold!"

They sprang forward to obey the order. This was the signal for Roaring Ralph to begin operations. He had drawn his revolver immediately upon gaining his feet, and this was now held in readiness for work. The crack of the ranger's revolver sounded, and one of them went plunging in a heap of unfinished banknotes that must have represented about half a million dollars. Then Roaring Ralph uttered his shrill war-cry, with which he was accustomed to strike terror to the hearts of his foes, and descended upon the body of money-makers like a hawk falls upon a flock of doves. They scattered at his onslaught as a drove of pigs would when a dog suddenly makes a plunge among them. Thus the ranger was enabled to reach the ladder that led to the upper floor. There was an open trap above. Roaring Ralph lost no time.

Springing to the trap, he seized hold of the ladder, and by an exertion of his great strength, after mounting the ladder and reaching the floor above, he threw it over, and slammed down the trap. He then arose to his feet, laughed heartily, and seizing his rifle from the corner where it had remained all of this while, was about to unbar the door when he heard voices outside. At first he was half inclined to dash out and fight them anyhow, but presently he realized that there were

quite a number of the newcomers, who were evidently the distributors of the money mill, coming for a fresh supply of the "queer." Thinking that after his recent imbroglio discretion was the better part of valor, Roaring Ralph quietly unbarred the door, so as to give them the impression that he had slipped out, when it came to an investigation, and then, with cat-like steps he mounted the ladder that led to the loft, where he crouched low, rifle in hand, as cool as any cucumber that ever grew in the shade of a cornstalk.

### CHAPTER XIV.

#### SINGING SWAN.

Neither Reckless Rupert nor the prairie sharpshooter had ever been cooped up in a Blackfoot Death Lodge before, but they knew what it meant, all the same. There was no hope for them, in the opinion of the Indians, who had already condemned them to death. Strange to say, however, the two men seemed in no wise concerned. They appeared as cheerful as if no danger hovered over them. Thus the night passed away. Morning came at last. A breakfast was brought to them upon platters of bark, consisting of venison and succotash, to which they did justice, as may readily be believed.

While they were eating, Silver Rifle looked up, and found himself the cynosure of a pair of black eyes, the owner of which had entered the lodge after the guard had withdrawn, but so silently that neither of them had been aware of her presence until the prairie sharpshooter thus accidentally discovered it. Their visitor was an Indian maiden, and it was plain to be seen that she was the daughter of a chief from her dress. She was very pretty, and her form one that, for contour, Venus might have envied. As her garments were gaily decorated with wampum, and colored beads and quills, as were also her leggings and tiny moccasins, she presented quite a beautiful picture. As Silver Rifle saw her gazing so fixedly at him a thought flashed into his mind that was almost an inspiration. This untutored child of the forest had taken it into her head to fall in love with him. He could see it in her every action, and beaming from her bright eyes. Might she not be of some assistance, then, in carrying out his plans? To his surprise the Indian girl spoke, and in such good English as to amaze both himself and Reckless Rupert, who now looked up.

"Silver Rifle has come to the Blackfoot town. Many moons ago, Singing Swan saw him in a dream, and knew he would come some day. She is glad, for to her there has been none like Silver Rifle, the young hunter of the prairie."

Reckless Rupert looked quickly at his companion, to see how he would take this, and, to his surprise, saw an actual flush of pleasure upon the young man's face. Reckless Rupert pretended to be busily engaged in eating, but now and then a sly look told him that the arm of the young fellow was around the waist of the Indian girl, and a fiery indignation took possession of the honest trapper when he thought of Dolly, and what was due her from her lover, though he said nothing aloud. Silver Rifle entered into conversation with the Indian girl, and his face lighted up as she proposed the very plan he had in his mind. Pretty soon the girl left them alone, but not for long. Several redmen made their appearance, and Silver Rifle was taken away. What they were going to do with him Rupert could not at first guess, and it was only when he had climbed up to a crack in the log-wall and looked out, that he saw what it meant. The bonds of the prisoners had been cut when they were thrust into the Death Lodge, so that Rupert did not have much trouble in scrambling up to the small hole through which the daylight was coming. Among some of the chiefs stood Silver Rifle, and in his hands was his favorite weapon. It was evident that they were about to witness some specimens of his skill. Soon the performance



was about to begin. Silver Rifle went through the old tricks of bringing down a hawk, splitting a bullet by shooting at a knife thrust into a tree, striking a penny thrown up into the air. Then came more difficult work. Dolly made her appearance, and placed a small gourd upon her head, as on a previous occasion. Reckless Rupert shut his eyes and gritted his teeth until he heard the report, and then saw that the young girl was unharmed. The Indians were wonderstruck at the marksmanship of the young sharpshooter, but even more wonderful things were to come. Silver Rifle was shooting now with a greater object in view than he had ever had before, for the prize was life or death.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE WHITE WIZARD.

A gourd was now placed upon a short stick, fifty paces away. The Indians could not understand what was about to be done with this, and, therefore, kept their eyes wide open. Silver Rifle spoke a few words to a chief near him, and then handed the man his rifle, with the hammer drawn back, ready for firing. Silver Rifle suddenly sprang forward and threw himself upon the ground, as if about to turn a handspring. He did not go all of the way over, however, but remained with his feet in midair, where his hands should have been. Then, after balancing shortly, he stood upon his head, with his arms free. Acting according to instructions, the chief now placed the beautiful rifle in his hands, and, to the amazement of all the beholders, the young prairie sharpshooter proceeded to aim the weapon while thus standing upon his head. There came a sharp crack of the rifle, and those whose eyes had traveled meanwhile to the mark, saw the little gourd fly into several pieces. A chorus of grunts greeted the astonishing feat, and as Silver Rifle, by an acrobatic spring, gained his feet, he was seized by several of the chiefs, who, in spite of their dignity, insisted on shaking hands with the remarkable sharpshooter. All honors were immediately granted to the young fellow, and there was now no danger of his being sacrificed upon the altar of vengeance. Dolly had disappeared again, and as Reckless Rupert saw Silver Rifle walking composedly about, side by side with Singing Swan, he uttered something very like an oath, and leaped down from his post of observation. Night fell at last. The hours passed slowly to Rupert, who had fully determined that when midnight had arrived he would attempt to tunnel out of the strong lodge. Gradually the noise became less powerful, and at length, judging from the position of the moon as seen through the chink in the wall, he understood that the eventful time for him to begin work had arrived. Throwing himself upon the hard, rounded ground, he was about to begin operations when his ear detected a peculiar scratching noise. Instantly he was on his feet, all attention. In a few minutes he was able to decide that it came from the roof, and a short time later he made up his mind that the noise emanated from a keen knife in the hands of a powerful man. Someone was cutting a road in to him. Doubtless it was Silver Rifle, who had commenced his work. By effecting the escape of Reckless Rupert probably he hoped that Dolly could be carried off, and the end for which he worked be achieved. Satisfied with this idea, he waited patiently. After a time he could see the bright sky through the hole, which grew rapidly under the keen knife of the unknown. Still there was no alarm from the guards. At length the hole was large enough to admit of the passage of a human body. Then the midnight worker bent his head and peered in. The moonlight fell upon the face. It was a painted one—the face of his sworn foe, the Blackfoot brave who sought his life with the pertinacity of a fiend from Hades. Wolf Trailer.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### ROARING RALPH IN A TRAP.

When Roaring Ralph had gained the garret of the old cabin he crouched low and listened. The old fellow had been pretty well worked up by the exciting scenes through which he had so recently passed, but he calmly awaited whatever the future might bring forth. His first act had been to shut down the trap through which he had leaped to the lower floor while Yellow Bob and the other man were talking of him. He could still hear the voices without, and they were close to the door. Exclamations arose on all sides when they saw the gaping hole in the floor, and the thought might have entered some of their minds that lightning had struck the house, but for the fact of a man's head making its appearance through the trap. It was Yellow Bob himself. Hearing the well-known voices of some of his men above, the leader had thought it safe to ascend the ladder and see what had become of his reckless foe. Presently his comrades made their appearance, and explanations were in order. The amazement of the newcomers, when they heard that one man had committed all this havoc, and that this person was no other than Roaring Ralph Rockwood, was intense. They were sure he was still in the loft. Roaring Ralph had discovered a trap that led to the sloping roof of the cabin, and upon looking out, saw that it was still as dark as Erebus. By and by he knew that nearly all of the men had left the house. Were they about to allow him a chance to come forth? Hardly. These men did not entertain such humane feelings toward him; they would have taken much more delight in seeing him torn to pieces by wolves, or burned to death. Ah! what was that? The old ranger began snuffing the air with great avidity, as he gave that start, and it did not take him long to discover what he suspected.

"Grunters an' grubgrinders! Dust my Sunday breeches of 'tain't smoke! Ther critters hev me hyar like a coon in a hollow tree, an' mean ter burn me out. Ramrods an' rifles, but this air a perdicament."

It was indeed true. The money-makers had contemplated a removal to another home base for some time, and the action had been forced upon them now by the demolition of their cabin at the hands of the ranger. It was decided, however, that he should never be allowed to boast of his exploit. They had him cooped up in the loft, and there he should remain until his fate overtook him. Immediate steps were taken toward removal, and with such a force of men to work as was on hand, it did not take long to clear the cabin of all they wished to save. Then dry grass and leaves were thrown into the lower room, and after his men had formed a complete circle around the house, Yellow Bob concluded that the time had come for the completion of his plans. A match was struck. Upon this being applied to the pile of tinder a bright flame flashed immediately into existence, and the doom of the cabin was sealed.

"Good-by, old thunderbolt of the Colorado canyon!" shouted the money chief, as he sprang from the door of the cabin and rejoined his men. Old Ralph had been listening to the movements of the men below for some time, but for the life of him he could not guess what they were doing. Thoughts of his mission to the northwest flashed through his mind, and he wondered if he would find Silver Rifle in time to warn him that his enemy, the colonel, was, with a company of picked soldiers, searching for him, though ostensibly their mission was to scout among the Blackfeet, and see if they were ready to make a treaty with the whites. From this fit of abstraction the old ranger was aroused by the noise of his enemy, Yellow Bob. The meaning of the outlaw's words was not yet plain to him, though he was on the eve of a discovery. That it was, as before stated, that his olfactory organs caught



pungent odor of burning leaves, and the whole truth flashed in upon him. The situation was anything but pleasant to any man. Roaring Ralph, after venting his feelings in a tirade against the "tarnal critters," closed the hole above the ladder, and then faced the terrible dilemma.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## A PAIR OF GLEAMING EYES.

Blue Bill had not been seriously injured in his conflict with the panther, and they determined to spend the night in the hollow tree, so they lay down to sleep.

How long they slept they never knew—at least for quite a time to come.

Blue Bill chanced to be lying nearest the opening, and when he opened his eyes it was with the dim consciousness that something cold had touched him.

The sight that met his eyes was enough to freeze the blood in the veins of any man but the most daring. Outlined against the Heavens was the head of an Indian. He could see the face, black hair, and feathers that arose above the ebon locks.

The eyes of the redman glowed like sparks of phosphorescent light, and it was evident that he was glaring around the cavity for signs of those whose presence he suspected.

As has been remarked before, the moonlight did not penetrate the tree, so that it was not as much illumined at this hour as when Blue Bill had crawled in to meet the strange panther in his lair.

Without doubt one with such keen eyes as the redskin was supposed to possess could penetrate the semi-darkness with some effect, and it would be but natural to suppose that he had ere this detected the two forms of the recumbent rangers, though they might have been but dimly seen by him.

It had been the hand of the Indian, groping about inside the cavity upon his first arrival, that had aroused Blue Bill.

How the Blackfoot had found them he was utterly at a loss to say.

Perhaps it had been mere chance in his coming there. Then, again, there was a probability that he had heard the fight with the panther, watched their retirement into the hollow tree, and after waiting a reasonable time for them to give way to slumber, crept up, either to murder them in their sleep, or to verify his belief before starting for help.

There was also a third possibility.

The Indians who had escaped their bowies in the ravine might have found assistance in a short time, and returned to the scene of their disaster. Most persons would think it impossible to trail in the night, when the trees overhead prevented the moon's rays from reaching the ground in fifty places where it did accomplish this feat once, but Blue Bill was too old a campaigner to be thus ignorant.

Many a time had he trailed foes and game by torchlight, and had he found out for certain that the Blackfeet had accomplished this task, the fact would not have amazed him very much, though he would have admitted that they possessed much more sagacity than he had ever thought of allowing them.

All of these things flashed through the mind of Blue Bill in a much less space of time than it has taken either to write or read them.

His hand had intuitively strayed to his belt, and rested upon the shaft of his knife, for he seemed to realize that a struggle was imminent.

He now saw that the blazing orbs of the redman were fastened upon him, and could feel the cold hand moving up his body towards his throat.

It was evidently the intention of the warrior to throttle him. In order to accomplish this, he was obliged to bend

forward, so that his head was close to that of the ranger, who could even feel his hot breath upon his cheek.

To Blue Bill it made very little difference whether there was one Indian or fifty against whom he had to contend. He saw that but one course lay open to him, and did not hesitate about following it out, never caring what might follow.

Even as the Indian would-be assassin bent forward to accomplish his work, a hand that had a grip like that of a vise suddenly clutched him by the throat, and with an alarming abruptness the redskin was jerked into the hollow tree.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## IN THE TREETOPS.

There never lived upon the face of this whole broad earth a more daring man than Blue Bill.

Exerting his muscular force, Blue Bill turned the redskin over, and at it they went hammer and tongs. Old Pandey leaped to his feet like a flash at the first sign of trouble, and, as he could not tell whether his comrade was engaged with man, beast or devil, he contented himself with holding his rifle in readiness and watching for an opening.

His vigilance was soon rewarded.

A head appeared at the opening, unmistakably that of an Indian. Pandey hesitated a few seconds whether to punch the fellow with the barrel of his gun or give him the contents, deciding to do the latter, as it was not easy to reach over the two struggling forms.

As the report of the rifle sounded there was a howl from without and the head vanished. A terrific floundering could be heard as the unfortunate brave threshed about among the bushes, but Pandey was not listening to that. He had drawn his revolver, and waited for another target.

All at once, however, the fierce grip of the heathen relaxed. Bill heard a half groan, but knew that no effort of his had been so effective in causing the Blackfoot to give up the ghost.

A dim suspicion of the truth entered his head, and putting down his hand, he was not very much surprised to find that an arrow shot by one of the warrior's comrades from without had pierced his side and ended his days.

As the Indians seemed to be in considerable force, it was quickly decided that their best policy would be to remain where they were, as both of them had seen all the hard fighting they wished for on one night at least.

As the inside of the tree was rough, it was easy work for them to make their way up beyond the opening, Pandey slinging his rifle across his back, and Blue Bill carrying his in some mysterious manner.

The Indians, emboldened by the silence that had fallen upon their foes, crept nearer to the tree, and sent showers of missiles into the cavity, hoping to demolish the two daring rangers who had invaded their country.

Meanwhile the whites, finding the ascent so easy, had continued it, gradually leaving the ground far beneath them.

Pandey was in the lead. He had some crochet of his own which he intended putting into operation when they had reached the proper point. What it was Blue Bill had not the least idea, but he had complete faith in the old ranger, and when Pandey took the lead he would have followed even had it brought him to the eternal fires of some volcano.

Up they went.

Pandey found the passage growing more confined with every foot, but his idea as to there being an opening beyond them received fresh confirmation every instant, as he could feel the cool night breeze blowing on his face.

Finally his goal was gained.

As his hand fell upon the edge of the opening, Pandey knew that the triumph of his plan or else its utter failure was close at hand.



He poked his head out.

The moon had gone behind a cloud, and darkness had come upon the earth for the time being. It could not have been better. He lost no time in crawling out, and allowed Blue Bill to take his turn.

They found themselves upon a stout limb, which seemed to run into an adjoining tree. Out upon this the ranger immediately swung himself, and the shouts of the Indians below deadened any sound he might have made.

In this manner both of the bold scouts managed to reach the shelter of the adjoining tree, and without any loss of time started for the next one with the same success that had attended their efforts thus far.

Then they cautiously descended and, gaining the ground, darted into a mass of bushes upon the riverbank.

The Indians had by this time managed to discover that their birds had flown, and it did not take them long to guess that the two rangers were hiding up in the hollow tree.

"Look thar, kumrade; they're burnin' us out, by hokey," said Pandy, pointing back, and upon looking, Blue Bill saw that a fire had indeed been started in the hollow giant of the forest, and was roaring up the flume.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### AGAIN THAT GHOST.

Pandy spoke the truth when he declared that the Indians were trying to burn them out, supposing that they were still in the hollow tree.

They had piled brushwood all about the hole in the base, and even pushed quite a quantity inside, to which a spark was applied, with the immediate result of sending the flames up the flume with the speed of a racehorse, there being such an excellent draught.

Had the two hunters been in the tree their chances would have been exceedingly slim, for they would have had no opportunity to either go down or crawl up higher.

When morning came the two men came out from the bushes upon the riverbank at the point where we first found them.

There lay the log just as on the previous evening when they sat there and talked of their oath of vengeance and the marked trail.

Suddenly old Pandy gave vent to a quick ejaculation, and dropped to his knees. Something upon the ground had caught his eye, and by the way he scanned it, there could be no doubt but what the old man thought it of some importance.

"Great Snakes, Blue Bill, looky hyar; I leave it ter yer ter say what thet means," he cried.

Blue Bill threw himself down beside the old ranger, and as his eyes fell upon that which had drawn Pandy's attention, he too gave vent to the surprise that seized upon him.

"Ternal buffalo hoofs if it ain't the trail of the marked moccasin!" he cried.

It did not take these two trailers long to find out the truth so far as the presence of the man they hunted was concerned.

He had been lying behind the great log when they sat down upon it, and had without doubt heard all of their conversation. This must have been pleasant news for the hunted man.

The trail was now plain as daylight, and they lost no time in starting off upon it. If the man could escape two such veterans as these he ought to be allowed his life.

Longer grew the shadows.

They were now getting closer to the fugitive, for the trail of the marked moccasin grew warm. Often, even while they gazed upon the footprints, some blade of grass that had been trampled down righted itself, or in marshy spots the water still oozed into the crooked footsteps.

They glided on like two shadows, making no noise and uttering no sound. Indeed, could one but see them in the

light that grew continually more dim and deceptive, he would have been pardoned for thinking they were specter hunters.

In this way they came in sight of a dense copse, where the saplings grew thickly. Hardly had they sighted this than both men sank to the ground as if struck by a common impulse.

A human form was moving in advance of them, and evidently about to issue forth from the thicket. Their game was run down.

Pandy had one knee on the ground, and the rifle held in readiness. Whatever emotion he may have felt at the prospect of having the murderer of his old pard in his power did not show itself except in the look upon his face, and that was enough, for in it could be read the veteran ranger's whole soul.

Just at this critical instant, however, Blue Bill gave vent to a low cry of amazement. At the same time his hand shot out and covered the hammer of Pandy's rifle, so that even had it fallen the weapon would not have been discharged.

"What in the tarnal creation do ye mean, Blue Bill?" growled the amazed Pandy.

"Hush! you would never have forgiven yourself that shot. Look again, old hoss, and you'll see, not the man we're arter, the maker of the Marked Moccasin trail, but that self-same ghost of Bolly Wherrit that can't rest easy in its grave!"

He was convinced, and they proceeded on their way, but after a while fell into an ambush of Indians.

## CHAPTER XX.

### BATTLE IN THE STRONG LODGE.

Reckless Rupert could not repress an exclamation of mingled amazement and consternation when, upon looking up through the hole in the roof, his eyes fell upon the painted face of the brave whose hatred for him was so strong—Wolf Trailer.

As he crouched there and gazed upon the painted features of his foe, the hunter could not but admire the terrible hatred that would cause a man to descend to such means in order to accomplish his nefarious object.

Having completed his means of ingress, the dark-souled warrior, with murder in his heart, cast a last glance toward the coterie of guards seated some little distance from the door of the cabin, and then dropped through the hole, descending the rough wall with the agility of an ape.

No sooner had he come near the bottom than a pair of steel-like arms encircled his half-naked form, and Wolf Trailer was in the embrace of Reckless Rupert.

Then began the terrible struggle.

Wolf Trailer was not long in discovering that he had made a terrible mistake both in regard to the strength of the white man, and also his being unarmed.

A feeling of numb horror took possession of the doomed Blackfoot, when he realized the awful predicament in which his rashness had placed him. Having conducted his expedition in secrecy, he could hope for no succor from friends, and must, therefore, submit to the inevitable, and meet his fate.

Nor was it long in coming.

There was a sudden rushing blow, a deep thud, and the blade of the white Hercules had cleft the Indian's black heart in twain.

Wolf Trailer broke loose from the clasp that held him, and involuntarily gave vent to a sobbing death shriek that rang out with startling distinctness on the night air, after which he fell to the beaten earth floor of the cabin, dead.

Immediately voices were heard outside, the guttural tones of Indians, beyond doubt, and even as the white hunter clambered like an ape up the side of the strong cabin, the door below swung open.



## CHAPTER XXI.

## A WILD CHASE.

After leaving him for such a length of time, because events still more important claimed our attention, we must now return to the mysterious hunter who was left in such a desperate situation. He had quickly discovered that one of the halves into which the huge rock was divided was basin-shaped in the top, and that it would make him a good hiding-place he had not the least doubt. Of course, it could only be temporary, for the cunning Indians would eventually discover him; but his plan just then was to look out for the immediate future, and trust to his good fortune for a means of making his ultimate escape.

Intent upon carrying out this idea, he clambered up the rock, and concealed himself in its basin-shaped top just as his pursuers came thundering up and surrounded the queer rock.

Raising his head above the edge of the rock, he saw one of the Blackfeet, who had been left to do the duty of sentry, seated on his mustang. Suddenly, with the bound of a tiger, the hunter had leaped from the rock—landing upon the mustang just in front of the Indian.

The animal, amazed at this sudden addition to his load, darted away like a meteor—a circumstance that suited the hunter exactly, and one which he felt called upon to assist by every means in his power, by thumping the animal's sides, and striking him on the neck with his gun, using the stock of it.

By the time they had gone fifty yards the astonished redskin had partially recovered from the half stupor that seemed to come upon him when the hunter made his leap.

This he evidenced by his actions.

A pair of dusky arms glided around the form of the mysterious hunter, and as these suddenly closed upon him he found himself made the object of a peculiar embrace which was about as disagreeable as it was strange.

His rifle lay in an advantageous position, for he could feel its muzzle pressing against the chest of the redskin as he bent forward.

There was a half-muffled report, and then a cry of intense agony broke from the lips of the dusky rider, so close to the ears of the mysterious hunter that he could not but start.

The sinewy arms relaxed their hold, and so far as the redskin was concerned the white man had nothing more to fear, for when the report of the rifle sounded the mustang, still further alarmed, gave another leap forward, which action resulted in throwing the sorely wounded Indian from his seat.

A half-muffled yell from the rear proclaimed that all of this little tragedy had been witnessed by the redskin's comrades, and the heavy pounding of hoofs upon the prairie announced that they were in hot pursuit. For this the hunter cared next to nothing.

Gradually he was leaving the Indians behind, and had he kept straight on over the open land, in time he would undoubtedly have lost them, had no accident occurred.

It was his pleasure, however, to get among the trees, nor was he very long in reaching the point he had been aiming for. Quickly turning his steed to the left, he plunged into the growth, and was from that time lost to the sight of the Blackfeet, who might as well have searched in a haystack for a needle, as for the veteran hunter who had eluded them among the timber. Here we will leave the mysterious ranger, feeling sure that this is not the last to be seen of him.

## CHAPTER XXI

## BURNED OUT.

Roaring Ralph's situation was anything but pleasant. He had entered the lodge of the money-makers, secreted himself in the loft, overheard the conversation of Yellow Bob, the

money chief, and Black Donald, had suddenly made his appearance when the conversation had become warm concerning him, by dropping through an old trap in the middle of the floor, had engaged his old-time enemy, Donald, in mortal combat, and when the weak floor gave way, the three had been precipitated through the ragged opening among the counterfeits below. Then there had ensued quite a lively time, Roaring Ralph finally escaping to the room above, and managing to keep his enemies down.

Now and then the crackling of flames came to his ear, which sound informed him that they had seized upon the woodwork of the cabin, and in a few more minutes would undoubtedly make their appearance through the floor. He had not long to wait. Like a serpent's tongue the wicked-looking little flame darted into view, flashed viciously for a dozen seconds, and withdrew slowly, as if loth to leave the spot. Now was his opportunity. Quickly he raised the trap in the ceiling. Darkness greeted him, as he had expected, for the moon was not yet up, and the fire had not broken from the inside of the lower story, though it would without doubt do so in a short time. With the agility of a panther he drew himself through the opening, and shut down the trap just as the snake-like flame once more darted into view. So far, so good. As yet his enemies did not suspect his presence on the roof, and if he could only keep them in that delightful condition of ignorance all might yet be well.

Having crossed the roof, he came to one end. Here the largest tree stood, and quite a goodly limb hung over the cabin. He seized the limb and descended.

When near the ground he let go, to alight on top of another man, who ejaculated:

"B'ar's claws and buffler hoofs—hold on, stranger! We're friends, I reckon."

"How can I make sure of that?"

"Maybe you don't recognize my voice, Roaring Ralph, but I'm the fellow you took for a grizzly bear once upon a time away off in the direction of the Rockies. I reckon you can bring it to mind now."

"Sawdust an' sauerkraut, but will I ever furgit that time! An' so ye are the leetle detective chap what kerried Rocky Mountain Dick, the road-agent, off ter ther East? My mission in this hyar wilderness air ter find a lad called Silver Rifle, an' warn him that ther colonel air arter him wid troops; an' blame ef I don't find him ef it takes all summer. Thet's me, Roarin' Ralph, an' don't ye furgit it!"

## CHAPTER XXII.

## SEPARATED.

Sam Wherrit, the maker of the marked trail, had been in luck so far, for he had succeeded in avoiding those who were upon his track, and besides, was near the Blackfoot town where he expected to find safety.

When the Indians heard that Blue Bill, and the famous border trapper, old Pandy Ellis, were upon the trail of their White Chief, they said but little, though their actions were significant.

The White Chief was sent forward to the village in charge of a guide, and then the redskins, stealing through the forest along Sam's back trail for a score or two of yards, proceeded to lie in ambush for the two rangers.

They knew Pandy of old, and were quite confident that he would not give up a trail in which he was so intensely interested, simply because darkness happened to come on. In this supposition they were quite correct, as the reader has already seen. When the yelling demons sprang up on every side of them, and several fires of touchwood that had been held in readiness were ignited, the scene was one of tremendous power. Then the scene became a melee.



The Indians knew with whom they had to deal, and exerted themselves to the utmost to either capture or kill the veteran trapper; but when they determined upon this course they were pursuing a difficult matter.

Like a whirlwind he rushed here and there, leaving a death track behind him, and before the fight had been in progress two minutes the redskins had given up all hope of capturing him.

Blue Bill had not been quite so fortunate, for although he, too, had proved a giant in strength, hurling the redskins this way and that, there came a time presently when a spent bullet, glancing from a tree near by, struck him on the head.

Though he still retained his senses, the blow seemed to weaken and confuse him, so that before he could recover himself, a portion of the red band had hurled themselves upon him, bearing him to the earth.

He was soon in their power, and they quickly lashed his hands together.

Old Pandy was still raging around like a lion, but as the force that had been disposing of Blue Bill could now be spared to unite with the others against him, the time had come when he must of necessity turn his back on the foe.

Giving a hoarse yell of defiance, the veteran ranger burst through his assailants as a giant would a pack of pigmies, and leaping into the surrounding bushes vanished from view.

Thus the two comrades were separated. Would it please fate to again unite them? We shall see.

### CHAPTER XXIII.

#### A SURPRISE.

It had seemed as though the young white ranger, Reckless Rupert, was about to have his escape frustrated, after all.

The captors of Blue Bill, contrary to the custom of the Indians, had entered the village quietly with their prisoner, no doubt because they had lost so many of their number that shame had seized upon them.

A portion of the band, having charge of Blue Bill, made at once toward the prison lodge, unaware of the fact that it had already an occupant. As they drew near they were amazed to hear the death-cry of Wolf-Trailer.

At the same time several warriors, leaping erect, informed them that they had been stationed there as guards.

A rush was made immediately for the Death Lodge, and to the amazement of all, the door was found secure.

In their haste and excitement a slight hitch occurred, some pulling the door before the bar had been withdrawn, which, of course, rendered the task a doubly hard one.

This caused a delay of perhaps a minute, and was the salvation of the white hunter, for had the door been thrown open immediately he would have been found clinging to the side of the cabin.

As it was, he found time to gain the opening, and clamber through.

When the redmen finally opened the door and rushed into the place, they were able to see immediately the hole in the roof. What first chained their attention, however, was the body of the slain Blackfoot brave whose hatred for the prisoner had led him to adopt the strange tactics that had eventually brought him to his death.

One of them bent over and turned the dead brave upon his back, when he was recognized.

"Wolf-Trailer!" they said.

From this state of stupefaction they were aroused by cries without, which told plainly of another combat of some description, and thoroughly worked up to a tremendous pitch of excitement, the braves lost no time in rushing out, half believing that the terrible Pandy Ellis had already followed them, and was effecting the rescue of his comrade, Blue Bill.

This they speedily found was an error on their part, for those in whose charge the trapper had been left were not engaged in any turmoil, nor had Blue Bill exhibited any desire to escape.

It was speedily ascertained that the sounds of fighting had come from the other side of the lodge; indeed, a piteous sort of moaning told them something of this sort even then, and with weapons ready the excited Blackfeet rushed hastily around the prison lodge to find—what?

Reckless Rupert had lost no time in clambering out upon the roof of the lodge, and when the red imps had managed to open the door he was dangling from the further end, ready to jump.

Down he went like a rocket, struck the earth, staggered a little because of his peculiar situation, and started to dart away.

Just at this critical juncture a human form leaped erect in front of him. It was the young prairie sharpshooter, Silver Rifle.

"Come this way; I was about to attempt your rescue myself. Into this lodge—quick!"

As they entered the lodge it proved to have an occupant, much to the surprise of the hunter, who had left it empty ten minutes ago. A tall, lank Indian brave confronted them, and as Reckless Rupert would have hurled himself upon the redman, the latter caught him in an iron grip, exclaiming:

"Hold hard, ole hoss, till we compare notes."

It was old Pandy Ellis, sailing under false colors!

After Blue Bill had been taken to the Indians' camp Pandy Ellis crawled back to the scene of battle, disguised himself as an Indian, and succeeded in entering the Indian encampment, where he met Silver Rifle. Between them they had taken Dolly from the lodge where she was kept, and were about to try to rescue Reckless Rupert, when he unexpectedly dropped into their hands.

The Indian whose garments Pandy had appropriated was named Wolf Eye. He was slain by Pandy, and Pandy had made up his mind to impersonate him. It was also Wolf Eye's lodge where this scene was now taking place.

### , CHAPTER XXIV.

#### THE SECRET EXPEDITION.

The setting sun shone upon a singular scene in a ravine just at the edge of the great timber lands, among which lay the village of the Blackfeet.

Half a hundred horsemen were about encamping for the night.

They wore the uniform of the United States troops, and at their head was the officer whom we saw once before at the prairie shooting-match, when Silver Rifle worsted all competitors.

Besides these men, the colonel had half-a-dozen famous scouts, some of whom were now out, having gone in advance of the cavalry.

One of them had agreed to meet the colonel at this spot, which was known throughout the neighborhood as Moose Head Gully. The soldiers went into camp. Half a score of tents were placed in position, and the colonel, while quiet preparations were in progress for the evening meal, stood beside a tall, dead tree, looking earnestly toward the denser timber.

As the colonel stood there, wrapped in deep meditation, a man dressed in buckskin approached. That he did not belong to the cavalry was evident, for he made no military salute.

"We are near our goal, colonel. In this timber-stretch lies the Indian village. Thus far we have followed the young fellow's trail, and now that we have found out that they were captured by the Blackfeet, our work will be easy."



may be, however, that we will arrive too late to save the boy, for if that was Reckless Rupert's trail, as I am ready to swear, then there must have been tall fighting done, for which the reward will be death to the men."

"Heaven forbid, Lasso Rube," ejaculated the colonel, in such evident alarm that the scout looked up at him in astonishment.

"I thought you hated this young Silver Rifle, colonel?" he said, half questioningly.

"Hate him! No, you are mistaken, Rube. There is a question of dispute between him and me that forms a chasm which nothing can bridge over. If that was spanned, then—but, pshaw! it is nonsense to even think of such a thing occurring, for it can never be done. For this cause has my daughter left me, and it is Dolly whom I seek to save."

For a few minutes there was silence between them.

Then from out the dense forest there strode a buckskin-clad man, who dressed somewhat after the Mexican style, and who was no other than the noted ranger of the southwest, Mexican Mose.

As he came up he saluted the colonel, and then sat down upon the log.

Upon hearing the scout's report, a council of war was held, in which the several rangers present, together with the lieutenant under the colonel in command of the company, participated.

They were ready to do terrible execution among the Blackfeet should the occasion warrant it, being armed to the teeth, and having in their possession a Gatling gun, one of those fearful weapons which can hurl death among foes in the way of scores of bullets to the minute.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE MAN IN THE LOG.

"B'ar's claws an' buffler hoofs, but yer news takes my breath away!"

As the old Colorado ranger uttered these words, he sank back upon a log as if in truth entirely overcome.

"Now break it gently ter me. Tarnal snakes an' snails! thet air ther wust piece o' intelligence I hev heard fur many a day. My ole friend Bolly Wherrit dead—murdered! Thar's more in them words nor I kin git through my head ter once.

"Bolly Wherrit dead. The man I've laid down wid under the same blanket, fought side by side wid, tramped alongside an' swore by these twenty years back, gone under. Heavings ter Betsy but it makes me feel queer, my flesh creeps ter think o' it. No wonder ole Pandy air a ragin' like a mad bull. Sausage an' sauergraut; tie-me up in a blanket an' throw me inter ther great Colorado canyon ef I kin realize thet ole Bolly Wherrit air planted underground."

"Neither air he, ole hoss!"

The words came from he knew not where. It might have been the air above, the earth beneath, but of one thing old Ralph was quite positive about, and this was that his comrade had not given utterance to them, as he had been watching him at the time.

The old ranger sat there as if stupefied.

It was surely the voice of Bolly Wherrit that he heard, and coming upon the heels of the awful intelligence imparted by the little detective concerning the prairie duel, it aroused every grain of superstition in his nature.

Was Bolly's ghost speaking to him from the tomb?

"Traps an' trails! Dust my Sunday breeches, did ye hear that voice, Linrade? I wonder ef it air a sign that I'm goin', too, soon. Hit me into a Pacheco grave, but I'll swar that war the voice of Bolly Wherrit, Pandy's ole pard, an' ther ole yo' boy hev been under the sod this mon h'er so. Trousers an' breeches, but I'm a bull gunnery mixed up!"

"Ter a blamed fool, ef he kin or can't know it."

Roaring Ralph, this time, spoke up. It indeed with a sudden shock from an unexpected source, and from one great eye turned and fixed the scout, who had been seated. The detective still stood motionless, for he did not fully understand the matter, and there was nothing ghostlike about the proceeding to him.

"Painters an' powderhorns! rub me agin a hay-cutter ef he hain't addressin' me from ther grave. Bolly, ole chap, air that ye?"

"I reckon it are, old duffer," came the muffled and mysterious voice.

"Mustangs an' Mexicans! What air ye an' I in I do anything ter ease yer spirit, departed Linrade?" asked the accommodating ranger.

"I'm in this hyar blasted ole log, an' stuck fast, so I reckon ther best thing yo' kin do fur ther spirit o' ther departed Bolly Wherrit are ter pull his body out o' hyar right lively, afore I split ther log a-larfin'!"

Roaring Ralph immediately set to work to release the man in the log, but it was a hard job, as he soon found out.

Roaring Ralph exerted himself to the utmost, and the men in the log also used his muscles. The result was success.

How the hunter had become stuck in the log no one could ever see, but it was probably like thrusting a barbed fish-hook into one's finger, very easy to put in, but deuced hard to pull out, his arms illustrating a double barb.

Had it not been for the presence of our rollicking old friend, the imprisoned ranger could never have come out of that end of the log where he had entered, but would have been compelled to crawl along and eventually out through the half rotten terminus with his knife.

Upon being thus set at liberty the old ranger stooped over and took his rifle from the cavity that had so lately been his prison, after which he faced Roaring Ralph.

It was the mysterious old ranger whose adventures with the mounted Blackfeet we have witnessed.

"Dust my Sunday breeches!" roared the reckless trapper, "ef it ain't Pandy Ellis' pard, Bolly Wherrit, in ther flesh!"

After consulting together for some time they started for the Blackfeet encampment.

They therefore left the hollow log and moved forward, heading through the forest in the direction whence the Blackfeet town lay, according to their judgment. When they got there they heard a great commotion going on; as soon as it ceased they crept toward the council lodge.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE COUNCIL LODGE.

The council lodge of the Blackfeet was a singular affair, being nothing more nor less than a circus tent.

It had been put up in the regular way, with the poles belonging to it, but, as the Indians were novices in the circus line, their job was not very neatly done; in fact, the whole structure had a decided leaning in the direction whither the stout breeze was blowing, and but for one good strong rope attached to a deeply imbedded stake, the wind would have carried it over in a twinkling.

Pandy Ellis saw this in an instant, as he made a half circuit of the great tent, and like a flash a brilliant thought entered his head, which he retained for future use.

There was something of a crowd of squaws and boys gathered around the tent, into which most of the men were passing.

The bogus Wolf Eye, who was no less than Pandy Ellis in Indian disguise, who had taken that name, for it was the name of the dead brave he had taken the clothes from, with a daring that had often distinguished him, hesitated only long



enough to make sure that his revolvers were in reach, and his knife easy of access, when he followed the Indians inside.

It was an astonishing spectacle.

The Blackfeet were forming in circles all about the tent, the chiefs inside and the braves further back. They had got the hang of the hoop around the center pole, for a dozen stolen candles were blazing upon its tin sconces. It had been drawn up a dozen feet from the ground and the cord secured to the pole below. With every extra violent gust of wind, the hoop would swing to and fro, so that the effect upon the sea of dusky faces was strangely weird.

Altogether it was one of the most singular spectacles upon which old Pandy Ellis had ever gazed.

Standing near the center of the ring, he saw his comrade and fellow-avenger, Blue Bill. The ranger showed only defiance and disdain upon his face; fear had no abiding place there.

Among the chiefs, and yet only taking the part of a listener in the council, was a white man, and this Pandy felt sure must be the maker of the Marked Moccasin trail, the man he sought in order to avenge the death of his old partner; however, this was hardly the proper time for settling that feud; it would keep yet awhile, and in the meantime all of his energies must be devoted toward rescuing Blue Bill from the red fiends.

Finally all were seated, and it so happened that Pandy found himself vis-a-vis with Buffalo Bend, the sub-chief, who had led the party that had lain in ambush for Blue Bill and himself.

Several times he had found this man looking at him in a most peculiar manner, and it at length became evident to him that Buffalo Bend possessed a secret in which he was deeply concerned.

The council opened with the usual formalities, although the blowing of smoke to the four cardinal points of the compass was omitted on this occasion, and the pipe only passed among the chiefs and head warriors.

Then silence followed.

Suddenly one of the chiefs sprang to his feet, and delivered a short, impassioned address, in which he told the wrongs of the Indian at the hands of the palefaces, and declared that every mother's son of the latter should be wiped off the face of the earth.

Having had his say and introduced the subject, the fellow sat down.

He was succeeded by another, who managed to get along a little farther, and introduce the subject of especial hatred against the whites.

Others quickly followed.

Blue Bill's deeds were recounted by every one who had been in the terrible fight and came out alive, and he was called the brother of Heavy Knife, as old Pandy was known in this region.

Blue Bill had never before been so much flattered, though it was to be used in this instance as his doom.

He stood there and grinned as though mightily pleased. After that one piercing look he had not once turned his gaze upon the bogus Wolf Eye.

Finally Buffalo Bend arose, and by the wicked leer in his eyes, Pandy was aroused to expect exposure of some kind.

"A strange thing has happened," said the sub-chief, in intense tones; "while returning home, we came across the lifeless form of a warrior, shorn of his clothes, stripped of his head-dress, robbed of all he possessed." Turning to the disguised trapper, he thundered forth: "Spirit of the departed Wolf Eye, what would you have? Why have you not remained in the Happy Hunting Grounds? Speak!"

The scene was amazing.

Every Indian turned his eyes upon the warrior addressed. They did not understand the irony in Buffalo Bend's voice, and fully believed that the ghost of the departed Wolf Eye had, for some reason or other, attended their council.

As for the disguised trapper, he did not wait long.

Knowing that the game was up so far as his remaining in disguise was concerned, he sprang to his feet.

One agile leap carried him to the open space in the center of the assembly, where he stood, glaring around at the redmen like a lion at bay.

He was an adept in the Blackfeet language, and could speak it like a native, so that when he opened his mouth and uttered words, those around him did not immediately jump at the truth.

"The spirit of Wolf Eye has come over the river from the death-land to speak to his brothers. There is danger in the air. A man whom they fear is even now among them. Wolf-eye has come back, but not as he went, for he has changed into another. Warriors, look well on me; do ye not know Heavy Knife when you see him? Squaws, every one of you. A white man spits on you and defies you. Where are the Blackfeet when the Crows strike? Hiding in their lodges, with the dress of squaws upon them. There is not a warrior among you. A white man defies you all. He has come among you to save his friend, and when he leaves, death will be behind him. Watch, squaws and papposes of the Blackfeet nation, and see the act of a fearless man."

Pandy Ellis, after delivering his exordium, lost no time in fruitless speculation, but with one agile spring reached the side of his friend, Blue Bill.

All the eyes that watched him were not hostile, however.

While the Indians were giving their ideas relative to the business on hand, two forms had crept up near the back of the great lodge.

The cunning with which they made their way forward, screening themselves from the view of any Indians, whether male or female, who happened to be moving about, proclaimed their character.

Of course these two were old Bolly Wherrit and Roaring Ralph, who had made their way up from the lower end of the village.

They recognized Blue Bill, of course, but amazement would have been a poor word to express their feelings when the mock Wolf Eye proclaimed himself to be the daring old trapper king, Pandy Ellis.

They had by good fortune come upon that end of the tent furthest away from the fires. It was also the point from which the wind blew, and where the one rope strained with the force of the gale.

The hands of Blue Bill had been bound, but his feet were of course free.

When the old ranger reached the side of his comrade in distress, he held a long knife in one hand and his death-dealing revolver in the other.

To cut the bonds that confined the wrists of Blue Bill was but the work of an instant, and then Pandy thrust into the hand of his friend the revolver.

Having accomplished this much, he was ready to turn his attention to the redskins.

As may be readily supposed, the Blackfeet chiefs and warriors, although stunned in a degree by the presence of this hated and feared trapper king among them, were rapidly recovering their accustomed equanimity.

This was made evident by the loud outcries that began to make themselves heard.

Fortunately Pandy's plan was a feasible one. Leaping over to the great pole in the middle of the tent, he drew his knife across the cord that sustained the round hoop upon which



rested the stolen candles with which the council lodge was lighted.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE BORDER WHIRLWIND.

No sooner had the ranger's knife parted the strands than he held the end of the cord.

Springing back half a dozen feet he gave it a strong and sudden pull, elevating the lights still half a dozen feet further, then suddenly let go of the cord.

Down came the hoop with a crash.

Darkness ensued.

So far Pandy's plan had worked admirably, but of course there was more to follow.

A tremendous uproar ensued when the lights were thus suddenly extinguished, for every Indian seemed to vie with the rest in yelling himself hoarse.

Although the candles were about all extinguished by the sudden descent of the hoop to which they were fastened, the darkness that ensued was not very intense.

Through the large opening and over the heads of the Indians who crowded it, the light from the fires managed to enter. They had not been cared for so well since the council commenced, but still were capable of giving quite enough light to distinguish different persons.

A few hurried words in the ear of Blue Bill quickly let him into the main particulars of Pandy's plan, and he was ready to second it.

Toward the back of the great tent they made their way, killing as they went.

Together they reached the canvas at the end of the circus tent.

The bowie and revolver had opened a way for them when forcing a passage seemed an impossible task, and the path of blood left behind them attested to the terrible nature of this proceeding.

Pandy paused for a few seconds, but only to cast a hurried glance behind him. He gave vent to a terrible war-cry that rang out like a paean of victory above the yells of the excited Blackfeet.

Then his bloodstained knife made one downward swoop.

As he had intended, the canvas was rent by the blow, leaving a means of egress for his comrade and himself.

Through this they went with all speed, and almost before the Indians, who had caught sight of them by the aid of the resurrected candles, could realize it, they were on the outside of the great tent.

Here Pandy came to an abrupt pause.

The wind was blowing small guns, as a sailor would have probably expressed it, and the tent was straining at the long rope that held it, like a ship at her cable.

In an instant the old ranger's keen knife was at the rope.

There was a sharp report, almost like the discharge of a pistol, and the faithful rope had parted. Unable longer to withstand the force of the gale, the great tent seemed to totter for a dozen seconds, and then, to the horror of the Indians, came down with a rush, entangling fully four score of redskins under the canvas.

That was certainly a night of the most tragic events ever known to the denizens of the Blackfeet village.

The little detective had remained in the lower part of the village, among the lodges that had been for the time deserted, because all of the owners had gone to the council.

When he heard the racket begin in that direction he felt that his comrades, Roaring Ralph and the phantom

trapper, had fallen into mischief, and remembering their directions to create a diversion in their favor if such a thing was possible, hastened to fire the piles of dried grass.

The fierce wind, seizing upon the flames, soon communicated them to the adjoining lodges, and the destruction of the whole Blackfeet village seemed imminent.

Satisfied that the work left to him had been well done, the little detective at once made his way out of the village, aiming for the rendezvous where he was to meet his friends when their part of the job was accomplished.

Meanwhile the scene was growing in wildness at the other end of the village.

When the great tent, no longer supported by the stout guy-rope, collapsed, it buried three-fourths of the red warriors underneath it, and such a kicking and scrambling as occurred under that canvas you never did see.

It was every man for himself, and knives were brought into play in order to further the escape of the imprisoned braves. One thing may be taken for granted, and this was the fact that the great tent would not be worth much after such a performance.

Those who were near the sides crawled out, others came popping through rents made, and the other unfortunates were rescued as speedily as possible.

Pandemonium had certainly broken loose, to judge by the yells that sounded. Never had there been so much excitement within the bounds of the Indian village. There was the escape of the prisoners, Reckless Rupert, Silver Rifle and the pale flower; the capture of Blue Bill; sudden appearance of the terrible Heavy Knife in their sacred council lodge; the tremendous upheaval that followed when he put out the lights and, aided by Blue Bill, cut his way through their crowded ranks; the fall of the circus tent with fully four score of warriors caught underneath it, and finally the fearful discovery that the lower end of the village was on fire, with the fierce wind blowing the flames toward them in a manner significant and dangerous.

No wonder the coolest-headed among the Blackfeet confessed themselves sadly bewildered by this succession of events, and knew not in which direction to turn.

This state of inaction lasted not for long, however; their whole village was in danger from the conflagration, which must be stayed with all possible speed, leaving the pursuit of the daring palefaces to a later period.

Slow to reach a culminating point of anger, when such a thing does occur with Indians they are like so many mad wolves; and after all the defeats and indignities they had suffered at the hands of this little party of whites, when the time for retaliation arrived woe unto the wretched palefaces who should fall into their power; better for them that they had met their fate in the boiling mountain torrent or fierce prairie fire than to suffer the torture the furious Blackfeet would have in store for them.

The Indians went to work with a will to put an end to the conflagration that was already threatening to destroy their entire village. Just here their natural shrewdness came into play. Instead of wasting their time in subduing the flames themselves, which would have been an almost impossible task, considering their limited water supply and facilities for throwing it upon the flames—they wisely resorted to tearing down the lodges in a straight line across the village, and then working toward the flames, saving all they could.

Necessarily, therefore, the fire must come to a close as soon as the barrier presented by the open space was reached.

It happened just as the redskins had considered, for the furious fire finding no new material upon which to feed, seemed to gasp wildly, making ineffectual attempts to reach



the lodges beyond, and then slowly succumbed to the inevitable.

The threatening danger of a total destruction of their village by fire having been passed, and the unfortunates under the great circus tent rescued from their uncomfortable situation, the Blackfeet were now ready to look after the whites.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### TRACKED WITH TORCHES.

As has been said before, Bolly Wherrit and the old ranger, Roaring Ralph, watched the strange events that were taking place within the council lodge of the Blackfeet with great interest.

When Pandy Ellis proclaimed himself in the person of Wolf-Eye, they were struck dumb with amazement, and all Roaring Ralph could say was to keep muttering to himself that favorite but wholly incomprehensible expression:

"Dust my Sunday breeches!"

Much as the two men would have delighted in assisting their beloved comrades, this was rendered impossible by the action of old Pandy himself in extinguishing the lights, though when he did so he had no idea that friends were near.

All they could do now was to remain quiet, and with ready weapons, assist the two, should they be so fortunate as to cut their way through the mass of savages and out of the tent.

Presently, however, a slit appeared in the canvas close to where they were standing, and two men sprang through into the open air.

Even in the semi-gloom of the spot they recognized Blue Bill and the old prince of the prairie trappers. When Pandy stooped and cut the rope that proved such a support to the great lodge, both of them held their breath, for they at once grasped his idea.

Then with a crash and a whirl, the whole fabric keeled over.

A true ranger yell broke from the lips of the two lookers-on, and immediately they bounded to the side of Pandy and Blue Bill.

Bolly's great hat was pulled down further than ever over his face, for he did not wish his pard to recognize him yet. He also managed to avoid the old ranger's eye, and naturally Pandy thought it was some friend of Ralph's who was a stranger to him.

At any rate, this was no time for the meeting and the questions that would ensue, and Bolly was very wise in restraining his earnest desire to grasp the hand of his chum, and let him know he was still in the land of the living. The good news would keep, and now that he was in Pandy's company he could make sure that the vengeance he had sworn upon the alarmed fugitive Sam Wherrit did not reach its mark.

In a few words Pandy told that he had left some friends not far away, and towards the lodge of the late Wolf-Eye he led the way at a swinging trot, the others following, with Bolly Wherrit bringing up the rear.

The moon was now shining in the far eastern sky, but a better light than that was creeping up.

"Looky thar!" suddenly said Roaring Ralph, pointing to the end of the village where the red tongues of flame were already beginning to shoot upward into the air. "Chaw my ole moccasin fur soup ef ther little detec ain't gone an' done as we told him. Bullets an' bayonets, but this air exciting fur ther reds."

It was, most certainly, but then they hoped to turn the tables in a short time and make it equally as exciting for the whites.

The distance from the great tent to the lodge of Wolf-Eye was not very great, and they soon reached the latter, having only met one Indian brave on the way, and he had saved his

life by darting into a skin tepee, for our friends were in too great a hurry to bother with seeking him out.

Pandy plunged into the lodge, uncertain as yet whether his friends had continued their way or met with some obstacle and returned to the starting point, but as the lodge contained no occupant he was fain to believe that they had gone on.

He led the way into the ravine himself, and as our little party did not care much whether they were seen or not, their progress was much faster than that of Reckless Rupert and his companions had been.

They knew very well that the Indians would not waste much time in fooling about the village, and once on their trail they would follow it with the pertinacity of so many bloodhounds.

When the little band reached the edge of the forest, Pandy led them along for perhaps forty yards, and then drew up in the shadow of a huge sycamore tree, whose trunk was a perfect giant in point of size.

Here the old ranger chief uttered the cry of the night-hawk, very naturally following it closely with the mournful howl of the timber wolf.

As the racket in the village had died away in part, the signals sounded loud and clear upon the night air.

Immediately three forms appeared in view from the other side of the great tree, one of which was undoubtedly a female.

Of course, these were Reckless Rupert, Silver Rifle, and the prairie belle, Dolly.

There were now seven in the party, with one more to hear from.

The little detective soon showed up at a signal from Roaring Ralph, and they were now united. Bolly still kept in the background, for he did not believe the time had yet come to disclose himself.

As Pandy was unaware of the fact that he was still in the land of the living, a few hours more or less could not possibly make any difference to him, and while they were so near the village it might be dangerous to upset the old ranger in any way, especially when they needed his advice and cool-headed ideas so much.

So Bolly remained in the background, and kept his face well concealed. It chanced also that although old Pandy looked keenly at him on several occasions, as though weighing the probability of his ever having met him previous to this time, on each and every occasion Bolly chanced to be standing in the shadow of some tree that gave additional uncertainty to his form.

Led by Ellis, the little party at once started off through the forest. They had not been gone over two minutes when a Blackfoot warrior crept out of a clump of bushes close by, where he had been hidden, and made toward the adjacent village at full speed.

In less than twenty minutes four score of determined and enraged Indians, many of whom bore torches, were upon the trail of the palefaces.

The fugitives had not traveled far before they saw the torches of their pursuers following them. They made up their minds that they would have to fight it out with the redskins, and selecting a good high spot where they could have a decided advantage, they waited for their enemy. They were not long in coming. Then waged a fierce battle, in which our friends were victorious. Pandy Ellis and Bolly Wherrit came face to face. They fell on each other's necks. The savages having retreated, our friends now looked about them, and discovered a cave, which they entered, carrying torches. But they had been seen by one of the Blackfeet, and he signaled to the rest to come up.



While they were in the cave Dolly Wherrit and Pandy Ellis had a long talk about their various experiences.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DETECTIVE BAGS HIS GAME.

"Hist!"

At this thrilling, hissing whisper our friends came to a sudden halt.

Pandy Ellis, who carried the torch, had thrust it into a pool of water at his side, so that with marvelous quickness darkness had come upon the scene.

He had seen a light ahead, and as their own torch was extinguished, the others also discovered it. Pandy was a man never to be caught napping, and he quickly made up his mind to discover what this meant.

It could not be the sun, for dawn was just about breaking, and as to its having any connection with the infernal regions or disembodied spirits, the old ranger stood ready to ridicule the idea.

So he left them there, and began making his way cautiously forward.

It needed all of his prowess to successfully advance upon the mysterious light through such Stygian darkness, where a thousand traps and pitfalls might be awaiting his unwary feet, but the old ranger was the best man in the world for such an undertaking, and he proved this by not meeting with a single mishap during his forward movement.

When he had turned several bends, he found himself looking upon a curious scene.

At first he thought it was a band of trappers encamped in the cavern, but quickly realized his mistake.

This was the new abode of the border money-makers whom Roaring Ralph had worried into destroying their old cabin home, with himself in it, as they thought.

They were the ones who had ascended the canyon as far as it was practicable in advance of our friends.

He had heard from old Ralph and the little detective enough about those fellows to recognize them at once.

Of course they must look upon the money-makers as deadly foes, for such they would undoubtedly prove to be in a conflict; and besides, they were allies of the Indians.

When Pandy Ellis made his way back to the others, and reported what he had seen, a hurried council took place.

The little detective was terribly anxious to be at them, and as there was no other way out of the matter, the others soon agreed with him.

A forward movement was at once commenced. Dolly was placed in the rear, so as to be out of the way of stray bullets, and then the little band advanced slowly along the passage-way, led by Pandy and his old pard.

The money-makers only numbered about nine in all.

They were busy when our friends suddenly burst upon them; but, knowing what capture meant, they offered resistance.

Yellow Bob was amazed to find in the antagonist who crossed knives with him, the man whom he had so much cause to hate, and whom he thought had surely been cremated with the cabin; but for the time he became a human wildcat, and slashed away with such a vim that the Colorado ranger, in duty bound, soon felt compelled to give him his quietus.

It was not long before the battle was over. Three money-makers, besides the leader, remained as prisoners in their hands, and the rest had gone to that bourne whence no traveler ever returns.

The detective tumbled their machinery into a chasm near at hand, and destroyed the counterfeit money they had made, only retaining a couple which were to be used in convicting them when in the United States court.

Then the band moved forward.

It soon turned out just as our friends suspected it would. There were two entrances.

This fact had not been gleaned from any of the prisoners, for they were glum and sullen, and would not give a bit of information to please their captors, especially when they learned that the Blackfeet were after them.

One of the fellows had escaped during the melee and vanished down the passage in an opposite direction to that from which they had come, and forming their ideas from this, they hurried forward.

The Indians unfortunately were well acquainted with the strange cavern, and finding one entrance barred, hastened around to the other, where they came upon a fresh trail.

## CHAPTER XXX.

SAFE AT LAST.

Our friends were again at bay.

This time the situation was not so wholly in their favor, for the ground was more level, and their breastworks detached rocks.

The redskins had followed them with the keenness and pertinacity of sleuth-hounds, finally overtaking them here.

One rush had been made, but the deadly rifles of the whites had warned them that this system of tactics would not be tolerated, and they withdrew to a distance in order to consider other plans that would be more in keeping with discretion.

Pandy Ellis had freed the hands of the prisoners, and placing their own revolvers in them, sternly ordered them to fire; and that the first man who refused to obey would suffer for it they readily knew.

Perhaps their shots were not so effective as those of the others, but they did not dare to shoot wild while the old veteran's keen eyes were upon them, and the Indians were rushing forward in a body, so that in all probability some of their bullets told.

At any rate, their attitude seemed hostile, and the reports of their weapons added to the general clamor, thereby deceiving the Indians as to the real number of their foes.

The Blackfeet resorted to all kinds of tricks whereby they hoped to master their hated enemies, but the rangers were too cunning for them, and each artifice only ended in disaster for its originators.

Reckless Rupert watched Dolly with the carefulness of a brother, and did everything he could for her comfort.

To his surprise, Silver Rifle seemed in no wise jealous at his attentions, but rather seemed to be pleased with them.

What could it mean?

Was he tired of the prairie belle, and glad to get her off his hands? Rupert grew indignant in his heart.

"If he has discovered an iota, by my faith, his life shall answer for it. I will be a brother to her, since fate has denied me the right to a dearer relation," he murmured.

Afternoon came, and still the situation remained unchanged.

The Indians were determined to stand it out if it took all summer, and hoped that the whites would leave their position when the shades of darkness fell, for then they could fall upon them from the right and from the left, and quickly get their work in.

It was not very far from evening.

The Blackfeet had rigged up a moving barricade, made from small trees that had been felled and fastened together.

Behind this a score of them had advanced, and found shelter among some loose rocks that were connected with those behind which our friends knelt.

Then the barricade was hurried slowly back, probably with the intention of bringing out a score more.



The little detective declared himself able to dislodge those who had taken refuge among the rocks, and proceeded to do so.

His manner of going about it was singular indeed.

From his pocket he drew out a rubber sling and a small box, which, upon being opened, disclosed a dozen balls of intense blackness, about the size of marbles.

These were a species of hand grenade, and being composed in part of dynamite, would explode with a tremendous concussion.

While the rangers stood ready with their rifles, the detective measured the distance with his eye, then drew back his rubber sling, and with a quick movement, discharged the ball.

He alone could trace its course through the air, but a smile of satisfaction wreathed his lips as he saw that it was going all right.

Then the earth seemed to be shaken by a tremendous explosion among the rocks where the redskins had taken refuge. He followed it up with several more in rapid succession.

The first shock had probably stunned the Blackfeet, but as the others came, they dashed out like so many crazy men, "making a blue streak for shelter," as Roaring Ralph expressed it.

Then the trappers' rifles cracked merrily, and quite a number of the red nomads of the northwest fell to rise no more.

At about the same time the cheery sound of a cavalry bugle was heard, giving the well-known "charge," and the Blackfeet were discovered racing everywhere in a panic-stricken way, with the United States soldiers pursuing them.

"You are lost," said Reckless Rupert, turning to Silver Rifle, but the young prairie sharpshooter smiled and shook his head.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### CONCLUSION.

While his men were pursuing the terrified Blackfeet in all directions, chasing them like so many sheep, hewing and shooting them down, the colonel rode toward the little company of fugitives.

Reckless Rupert knew that the crisis was at hand. His fears were about to be set at rest forever, but in a way that would pain him terribly.

He saw the faces of Dolly and Silver Rifle light up as they recognized Colonel Harvey. The arms of the young prairie belle were immediately around the neck of the sharpshooter.

"How she loves him," muttered the watcher; "thank Heaven that I had no hand in bringing the colonel here; but it will be useless for me to hope, as nothing but death can part them. I will fight for them both; he shall not tear her away from the man she loves, even though Reckless Rupert lays down his life to prevent it."

Noble Rupert! worthy of any woman's love, even though she be next to an angel.

As the colonel drew nearer, Silver Rifle spoke a few words to the little detective, who looked toward the approaching horseman and nodded approval.

The colonel drew rein.

Though an old friend of Pandy and the rest, he seemed not to notice them now, for his eyes were glued upon the girl.

"Dolly," he said, sternly, and yet with a pathetic ring in his voice, "I have sought you far and near. Will you return to your heartbroken father, or remain with this young scoundrel, who has disgraced the name he bears?"

"Father, you have been unjust toward Lewis. My love for you has never wavered, but still I shall cling to him so —"

"Choose then between us!" thundered the old colonel, interrupting her; "choose the love and home I would give you, the love that has watched over you since your birth, or the

companionship of that boy, whose heart can never hold you as does mine. Choose, I say, and for all time!"

"Hear me then, father. You have shut the truth out of your heart and refused to let Lewis clear himself. Because he is innocent I cling to him so long as life lasts," she said.

"So be it," muttered the old colonel, almost choking as he turned his steed, "so be it! I will now return to my home. The weight of sorrow will soon lay me beside your mother in the grave."

"Hold!" cried a voice, "I have something to say about this, Colonel Harvey."

"Who are you?" asked the other, severely.

"I am Jean Barthol, Secret Service detective. My business out here has been to secure those money-makers. You knew me well once, Colonel Harvey. I know all about this affair. Yellow Bob here, alias Robert Stackpole, is the guilty man, as can be easily proven. Your son Lewis is as innocent as I. Leave Dolly with her brother, and come with me a few minutes, and I will convince you of this."

Reckless Rupert stood aghast.

Silver Rifle her brother! How his heart thrilled with joy, and the blood leaped through his veins.

He went up and took each of their hands.

Not a word could he say, but Dolly blushed furiously, and the welcome tidings that she loved him was conveyed to the young man's heart.

Soon the impulsive colonel came dashing up and, leaping to the ground, threw his arms around Lewis, begging him to forgive and forget, which the noble young man was eager to do.

All was joy and peace, but it could not last. Pandy and his fellow rangers held a sort of council, and decided that they had better be moving without any waste of time, for soon Big Buffalo would gather the adjacent tribes, and the country would be too hot for them.

They were followed by a large band of furious Blackfeet, but with the aid of the Gatling gun and the shrewd scouts, the Indians were defeated, and they reached the fort in safety.

Reckless Rupert gave up his trapper life, and after marrying the colonel's daughter, settled down to private life, being possessed of means.

Pandy and his dear old pard, after seeing Rupert married, and dancing to the affair, started for Leadville, where, of course, new adventures awaited them. Sam Wherit learned the truth, but preferred to remain with the Indians.

Blue Bill and queer old Roaring Ralph Rockwood also turned in the direction of the silver mines, while Lasso Rube and Mexican Mose went south.

Silver Rifle resumed his place as a young army officer, and thinks there is no girl in the world equal to his sister Dolly. As to the Indian girl, Singing Swan, he carried her away from the Blackfeet, discovered that she was a white girl adopted into the tribe, found out her parents, and ended by making her his wife. Here, dear, reader, we part, to meet again, I hope.

THE END.

Read "LIBERTY HOSE; or, THE PRIDE OF PLATTSVILLE," by Ex-Fire-Chief Warden, which will be the next number (477) of "Pluck and Luck."

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# Pluck and Luck.

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## THINGS OF INTEREST.

The Brazilian linen plant is expected to exert an important influence upon the textile world in the near future. It is a common weed which reaches a height of eighteen feet in twelve months. When carefully cultivated it matures within three months, and can yield three crops in a year. The fiber has all the qualities necessary for high-class use—strength, fineness, flexibility, and adaptability for bleaching, dyeing, etc. Every part of the plant can be used for some industrial purpose, more especially for the manufacturing of writing paper. The cultivation was commenced by the State Government, and now is said to have emerged from the experimental state successfully.

There is a slab of black stone in the British Museum which, if you could walk away with it, and establish your claim as the owner, you could sell any day for a quarter of a million, and find half a dozen money kings in England and America ready to buy it. There is nothing very striking about this stone; it might be a piece of black marble with some peculiar hieroglyphics upon it. But it is just these hieroglyphics which make it so valuable, because they are the key to all the ancient writings of the Egyptians, and without this stone, called the Rosetta Stone, we should be unable to read the Egyptian writings which have been discovered from time to time. Some French tourists found the Rosetta Stone in Egypt, and transported it to Paris, where an Englishman took a fancy to it for a garden ornament. He paid \$25 for it, and got a treasure which you could cover with gold, and yet not represent its value, but till the day of his death he did not know what that bit of stone was worth.

Sir James Colquhoun's desire to be buried in full evening dress costume recalls, says the London Evening Standard, curious last wishes of other testators. George Herring directed that his remains should lie beneath a sundial at the Haven of Rest, Maidenhead; Queen Victoria planned the entire programme for her funeral, even choosing the music to be played, the anthems to be sung. A couple of months ago a young lady who died at Reigate on the eve of her wedding was buried in her bridal dress, the friends who were to have been her bridesmaids attending the funeral in the gowns which they should have worn at the wedding, and carrying in place of wreaths the wedding bouquets. More singular was the funeral of Major-Gen. Algernon Stewart at Hascombe, Surrey, eighteen months ago. The coffin was drawn to the grave by the dead man's horse. The mourners walked, and the bearers wore old-fashioned smocks, each with its collar adorned with a text. The same men appeared in their mourning garments at the church service on the following Sunday.

One of the most interesting and remarkable of the many for the observation of sand dunes lies between Bor-

deaux and Bayonne, in Gascony. The sea here throws every year upon the beach, along a line of one hundred miles in length, some five million cubic yards of sand. The prevailing westerly winds continue picking up the surface particles from the westward slope, whirl them over to the inward slope, where they are again deposited, and the entire ridge by this means alone moves gradually inward. In the course of years there has thus been formed a complex system of dunes, all approximately parallel with the coast, and with one another of all altitudes up to two hundred and fifty feet. These are marching steadily inward at a rate of from three to six feet a year, whole villages having sometimes been torn down to prevent burial, and rebuilt at a distance.

It has just been discovered that the upheaval of April 18 did funny things to the wells in the courtyard at the rear of the San Francisco Mint. For years prior to April 18 these had been ordinary, well-behaved wells, yielding water plentifully when a steam pump was employed. But now they are spouting artesian wells, from which a steady stream of water flows when the pumping is done. This was discovered yesterday when the pump was taken out for repairs, the courtyard being flooded within a short time. The wells were bored many years ago, and are about 175 feet in depth. There was apparently a subterranean connection between them, for the pumping of water from one lowered the water in the other. Normally the water was within thirty feet of the surface, and that was the condition when the pump was taken out last March. Yesterday, for the first time since March, the pumps were again removed, when it was discovered that the water flowed freely.

## OUR COMIC COLUMN.

Mr. White—Pardon me, but is this Smith street? Mr. Black—No, sah, dis am Jones street. Smith street done run per-zackly paralyzed to this one, sah.

"Some er de loudes' talkin' reformers," said Uncle Eben, "makes me think of a bald-headed man goin' roun' sellin' hair restorer."

"Some men," said Uncle Eben, "gits de reputation of bein' stuck up, when de troof is dey is too bashful to try to run anybody's business 'ceppin' deir own."

Manager—Thompson, you are discharged. Clerk—But what have I done, sir? Manager—Nothing, absolutely nothing. That's what I complain about.

When Wesley was about three years old, a friend who had not seen him for some time greeted him with: "Well, Wesley, what have you been doing since I saw you last?" "Been growin'," was the rather unexpected answer.

Lawyer—Now, Jim, you have heard the last witness on the stand. Would you believe him on oath? Jim—B'lieve dat nigger? Why, boss, he's dat ontruful if he jus ter tell me he was hungry, an' I kno'd he hadn't a coufful in a month, I wouldn't b'lieve him!

A man left his umbrella in the stand in a hotel recently with a card bearing the following inscription attached to it: "This umbrella belongs to a man who can deal a blow of 250 pounds weight." On returning to seek his property he found in its place a card thus inscribed: "This card was left by a man who can run twelve miles an hour. I shall not be back."

Lady—Doctor, I wish you would call around to see my husband some evening when he is at home. Do not let him know that I asked you, because he declares he is not sick; but I know he has consumption or something; he is going into a decline. Doctor—I am astonished, but I will call. What are his symptoms? Lady—He hasn't any except weakness. He used to hold me on his lap by the hour, and now even the baby tires him.



# A TIMELY ATTACK

OR,

THE PIRATE'S LAST RESORT.

By COL. RALPH FENTON.

Although Commodore Porter with his West India squadron for the suppression of piracy was meeting with every success in breaking up the haunts of the outlaws in the region of Matanzas, on the coast of Cuba, yet, further to the westward there was one freebooter who still continued his depredations.

In a swift schooner, as sharp as a sword-fish, he would suddenly emerge from one of the rugged coast bays and pounce upon any merchant craft that he saw passing in his vicinity.

No quarter would he give to his luckless victims.

Their pleading cries were ever merged in their death shrieks as they were mercilessly put to the sword.

Then, after the captured craft was plundered, she would be burned to the water's edge, thus serving as the funeral pyre of her slain occupants.

From a pirate prisoner, who, in the hope of being pardoned had turned informer, did the commodore hear much of the outlaw of the west coast.

He learned that, among his men, this pirate chief was known by the name of Captain Cain—that he was a big, bearded, villainous-looking person of thirty-five, was possessed by unusual daring, and had sworn that he would never be taken alive, should he be attacked by any war vessel.

His schooner, which he knew how to conceal, when occasion required, among the rocks, and which was named the *Serpent*, was a small vessel of light draught, carrying three ten-pound carronades and a numerous crew of cut-throats as fierce as wolves.

"You must, if possible, not only capture the schooner, but must also capture the pirate chief, and be sure you use every precaution to take him alive."

So said the commodore to Roland Gray—one of his passed midshipmen—a fine-looking, manly youth of nineteen, whom he had put in command of a small gun-brig, the *Spitfire*, with four guns and a crew of sixty men, to cruise for the formidable outlaw.

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Gray. "I will use every effort to comply with your wishes."

Having received a few more directions, the youth entered his cutter and was rowed back to the brig, which lay not far from the flag-ship.

The young officer speedily got up anchor, and, having a fair wind, he made good progress on his course.

Two days later the *Spitfire*, close-hauled in a light breeze, was gliding along within a stone's throw of the west coast of the island.

There was a fog-cloud extending parallel with the shore, while further out to sea the atmosphere was clear.

The brig was nearing a lofty, far-extending headland, whose shadow blending with the mist was almost as dark as that of night, when the sound of a gun was heard on the other side of the elevation.

It was quickly followed by another. Then there was a dull crash as of the falling of a mast.

The brig was kept off, and, as she glided on in the deep shadow of the headland, her occupants suddenly beheld a vessel emerge to view, round the extremity of the projecting elevation, to be soon after followed by another in pursuit.

The former was a bark, evidently a merchant craft, and her pursuer was a low, sharp-bowed schooner, with a black flag to her gaff.

"'Tis the pirate," said Roland to Mr. Sanders, his acting lieutenant.

"Ay, ay, sir," replied Sanders, "and better than all, she does not suspect our being in her vicinity."

"Fortune indeed seems to have favored us," said Roland. "Tell the men to make no noise, but to lurch on their cutlasses."

The order was promptly given to and obeyed by the stalwart fellows forward and in the waist.

A scarcely audible murmur of approval circulated among them, as with folded arms they stood awaiting further commands.

The pirate had probably shot suddenly out of one of the coast bays, and was now less than a quarter of a mile beyond the edge of the fog-bank, darting like some fierce shark toward the bark.

The smoke still was faintly visible about his bow, showing that the gun which had been heard was his bow-chaser, and the ragged stump of the bark's mizzen-mast, with the wreckage alongside, which last was being cleared away, indicated the accuracy of his aim.

Shrouded by the fog-bank and the shadow of the headland, which completely hid her from the gaze of the people aboard the pursuer and the pursued, the brig kept on her way.

"Steady, there, at the wheel," said Roland, in a low voice to the man at the helm.

The old sailor who was steering gave the customary "ay, ay, sir!" in the same low tone, while he kept the vessel on a bee-line.

As stealthily and swiftly as a water-serpent the brig held on her course.

The pirates were still yelling, for they now looked upon their prize as certain.

Aft, on a gun carriage stood a tall, villainous-looking, heavily-bearded man, wearing a sort of embroidered vest, slashed trousers with buttons at the sides, and high boots, while in a sash about his waist were a long knife and a pistol.

"That must be—the pirate chief—Captain Cain," remarked Roland to his lieutenant, in a voice scarcely above a whisper.

"Ay, ay, sir, and a forbidding-looking fiend he is," was the reply.

Meanwhile the bark was now heading diagonally toward the shore, as if her captain had some faint hope that by entering the fog-bank he might elude his pursuer.

His men could be seen hauling on sheets and halyards to give what canvas remained to them as much drawing power as possible.

On her quarter-deck stood a girl clinging to an elderly man, as Roland could see through his glass.

The two were evidently father and daughter, and naturally the girl was much terrified.

To head off the bark the pirate now slightly changed his course, running along parallel with the fog-bank.

Roland waited until the schooner was less than fifty fathoms from the brig, when his clear voice rang through the vessel:

"Square the yards, there! Up helm!"

The men quickly obeyed, and suddenly the *Spitfire*, emerging from the shadow and the fog-bank, headed straight for the pirate.

At this unexpected sight there was a wild cry from the lawless crew, who, wearing low red caps and dark shirts with sashes bristling with knives and pistols, had been collected about the low bulwarks of the schooner.

Then the voice of Captain Cain came rolling like thunder over the sea, as he shouted:

"Tacks and sheets there! Ready for wearing around!"

As lightly as a sea bird the schooner spun round upon her keel, but even as she did so the ringing voice of Roland Gray was heard:

"Fire!"

The whizzing sound of the shot followed, then crackling and snapping the schooner's mainmast slowly tottered, until with a crash it fell, top hamper and all, alongside.

"Clear the wreck!" roared Captain Cain, and some of his nimble crew were seen plying their axes.

The schooner being thus disabled the brig gained upon her rapidly.

"Now, boys, stand by for boarding!" said Roland to his men.

The deep "ay, ay, sir!" rose simultaneously from the hardy fellows, mostly young men, while their eyes flashed with and daring.

At that moment two of the schooner's guns were seen



at the brig through a space below the taffrail, which Roland's shot had made by breaking the bulwarks.

The young captain kept his gaze upon these guns, and just as one of the outlaws had lifted a match to apply it, he ordered the man at the wheel to port helm.

The brig swung up slightly as the guns were fired, and the shot grazing her side merely knocked a few splinters from her quarter-rail without doing further damage.

"Up helm! Steady!" continued Roland. "Ready, there, you boarders!"

The lieutenant repeated the order, and the nimble crew ran out on the booms and sprang into the rigging, where they stood ready to leap upon the deck of the foe.

Captain Cain was heard for a few moments uttering the most awful curses.

Then he gave the command to stand by to repel boarders, and his men, armed with cutlasses, pistols and pikes, stood prepared for the conflict.

With a thud the brig struck the schooner's quarter, her booms projecting over her, and as she moved on, grating along-side, the young captain again shouted:

"Make fast! Away there, you boarders—away!"

Then, while a few of the men made the brig fast to the schooner with lashings, the others, with their young captain, sprang upon the pirate's deck.

A desperate combat ensued.

"Give it to them, boys, but spare the pirate captain!" shouted Roland. "We are to take him alive and capture his vessel as a prize."

"Curse you, you shall never live to do that!" roared Cain.

He leveled a fresh pistol he had snatched from a fallen man at Roland's head as he spoke.

But as he was about to pull trigger, one of the brig's seamen knocked the weapon from his grasp with a blow from his cutlass.

A gigantic pirate rushed upon the sailor, who was soon engaged with him hand to hand, while Roland closed with the captain in a sword combat.

Cain was no mean master of his weapon.

So rapidly were the swords wielded that sparks flew from the blades.

The pirate, thinking he saw an unguarded movement on Roland's part, aimed a savage thrust at his heart. This was the young captain's opportunity.

With a quick bend of his body, he avoided the keen steel, and then by a swift, backhanded stroke, he broke off Cain's blade at the hilt.

"Yield, fiend, yield!" cried the youth. "There is but a handful of your men left. They are about vanquished."

As he spoke, he pressed the point of his sword against the breast of the outlaw.

A quick glance did the latter throw about him.

What men of his crew were left had been driven aft.

Seeing their chief disarmed, and as their numbers were being still more reduced, while only eight of their opponents had been killed and wounded, some of them presently threw down their arms and sullenly surrendered, when the others were compelled to follow their example.

"Fools—cowards!" wrathfully roared Cain. "All shall suffer for this!"

With a backward leap, he drew himself several feet away from Roland's sword, and ere he could be seized, sprang through the companionway and down into the cabin.

"Follow me, lads, some of you, and capture him!" cried Roland, as he snatched from the deck the pistol which had been knocked from the pirate's grasp and which had fallen on a coil of rope.

He saw Cain enter a room and heard him close and lock the door.

Roland ordered the men with him to break it open.

While they were trying to do so the voice of the pirate was heard.

"Too late!" he shouted. "Before you can break open that door, you are all dead men. The powder magazine is here, and will balk you by blowing up the schooner and perishing her! Never shall she or I fall into your hands!"

The men threw themselves against the door, the lock gave way and it swung open.

As the sailors entered, they saw Cain kneeling by a long hatchway, the hatch of which had been raised on its side, revealing the run below, in which was the powder magazine.

In his left hand he held a gun-match or lin-stock, taken from one of several match-tubs in the room, which contained other implements of warfare.

The outlaw had also possessed himself of a pistol, which he grasped in his right hand.

He had already lighted the gun-match, and was about to hurl it into the magazine, when a nimble sailor sprang forward to prevent him.

With an oath the pirate discharged his pistol at the man, sending the bullet through his body. The sailor fell upon his back, in his dying agony clutching the side of the raised hatch.

Again Cain was about to throw the match into the powder magazine, when another seaman, with a blow of his cutlass, inflicted a deep gash on his wrist, rendering the hand powerless.

The next moment the pirate was a captive in the grasp of several of the men.

He was taken aboard the brig, and as soon as his wounded wrist had been attended to by the vessel's doctor, he was confined with the other captives in the steerage.

Roland now had the schooner's deck cleared, and manning her with a detail, who rigged a jury-mast forward, he prepared to sail to rejoin the squadron.

Before sailing, however, he was rowed to the merchant bark which had been saved by his timely attack on the pirate.

The bark proved to be the *St. Malo*, a Spanish vessel, bound from Brazil for Havana.

The girl and elderly man, the passengers aboard the vessel whom he had previously seen, were an American merchant named Edward Warren and his daughter, Charlotte. The latter was a beautiful maiden of seventeen, and when the merchant cordially invited Roland to visit him on the first opportunity after his arrival at Havana, it is needless to say that the youth accepted the invitation.

A jury-mast was rigged aboard the bark, and in company with the brig and captured schooner she sailed for her destination.

She safely arrived there, and a day later Roland Gray rejoined the squadron and made his report to the commodore, who was much pleased and who promised to promote him.

Cain and the survivors of his crew were tried and sentenced at Havana by a special court, with some of the American naval officers—among whom was Roland Gray—presiding at the trial. The pirate's men, to save time, were shot dead, but their chief was hung to a gallows erected for that purpose, near the public prison.

Thus disgracefully perished the fiercest and most daring of all the Cuban pirates.

His remains were deposited under a black rock near a lonely part of the seashore, about two miles from the port.

This gloomy landmark remained in sight for some years, when it was buried by the encroaching waters of the ocean.

His presence at the trial in Havana had afforded Roland an opportunity to visit the merchant who had invited him.

Charlotte and he were mutually attracted, and, as may be imagined, he saw her as often as he could obtain leave of absence from the commodore for that purpose.

A few years later, at which time Roland had been promoted first lieutenant, and was then aboard the sloop-of-war *Blaze*, at anchor in the port of Havana, the young officer and the beautiful girl were made man and wife at the home of the bride's father.

They proved to be a congenial couple.

Charlotte accompanied her husband on his cruises, until finally at her request he gave up his sea life to accept a position in the Board of Navy Commissioners at Washington.

In a pleasant home on the outskirts of the city, in the society of his devoted wife and a family of interesting children, he spent many a happy day, and ever thankful he was for the chance which had enabled him to save and win for his own the loveliest and best of her sex, by "A Timely Attack" upon the most desperate of the Cuban pirates.



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